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# THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS





# THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

By GERALDINE ELLIOT



ILLUSTRATED BY SHEILA HAWKINS

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS  
NEW YORK



Juv. col.  
PZ  
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.E44  
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## FOREWORD

All through the African day men and women, children and animals, on their way to the maize gardens, to the water holes, to the hunting grounds, to the forests, pass through the long grass. What happens there to beasts and men cannot be spoken of in the daylight. But at night the people gather round the flickering fire, within the dark circle of the hut, to hear the grandmother, as she leans against the hut pole, telling how the animals live and talk. Her imagination and her personality illuminate the ancient stories with her own turns and phrases. The story is the same, but its telling is ever changing, for the long grass whispers its secrets anew to each hearer.

In the country of the Ngoni people I have myself heard old women telling stories in the huts after dark, as they have done for generations past. Such tales are not forgotten, for they are part of a people's heritage. An old Ngoni man, who listened long ago to his grandmother, told these stories to the author. Her imagination has clothed them in her own speech, captivating all listeners, young and old. For, as the Ngoni say, "These tales are delighting and full of laughs."

MARGARET READ.





*to Olwen*



# THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS







## THE IGUANA WHO WAS ALWAYS RIGHT

KALULU, the Rabbit, sat at the mouth of his burrow idly watching the fireflies and wondering which of all his friends he most wished to see. It was a fine night and he had just finished a dinner of succulent young leaves and all he needed now was somebody to talk to. Kamba, the Tortoise? Rabbit considered the matter. No, not Kamba, he decided—he had seen Kamba the previous evening. And certainly not Chule, the Frog, who was making such a noise croaking away in the valley! Antbear

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

was probably busy and Warthog would be out with Bush-pig, but there must be someone . . .

And, sure enough, there was, for at that moment, Nkhandwe, the Jackal, came trotting along the path and Rabbit knew that he was the very person he wanted.

"Oh, Jackal," said Kalulu, as he jumped up to greet his friend. "I am glad to see you. It's days since you were round this way. What have you been doing?"

"Trying to catch Gondwa, the Iguana," replied Jackal.

"Why?" asked Kalulu. "Why should you want to catch Gondwa?"

"Don't you know? Haven't you heard?" Gondwa has offered a prize to anyone who can catch him. A bag of beans. He boasts that he knows everything; that he never makes mistakes; that he is far too clever to be caught. The conceit of the creature!" Jackal almost snorted.

"And he has offered a bag of beans as a prize?" said Kalulu thoughtfully. "I could do with a bag of beans."

"So could I," agreed Jackal. "So could any one of us. The trouble is that Gondwa knows his beans are safe. He is clever. He is difficult to catch. I've tried and I know."

"What happened?" asked Rabbit curiously.

"Well, you know that Gondwa loves Crocodile eggs? I hunted until I found one by the river bank and I rolled it all the way to Gondwa's cave."

"How did you get it up the face of the rock? The cave is so far above the ground."

"I didn't. I couldn't have got it right into the cave and I didn't want to. That was all part of my plan. I just left the egg on the ground below and then I hid in the grass and waited. Bye and bye I saw Gondwa's head peeping cautiously out of the cave."

"'Oho! A Crocodile's egg!' says he. 'A Crocodile's egg in a place where no Crocodile has ever been! Now I wonder who put that there?' says he. Then he pokes his head out a

## THE IGUANA WHO WAS ALWAYS RIGHT

little further and looks about. 'I suppose that isn't Jackal hiding down there in that clump of grass? Looks *very* like Jackal's spoor leading to it, and I shouldn't be surprised if Jackal didn't think he was going to win a bag of beans! Do you, Nkhandwe?' he demanded suddenly. I didn't answer, so, after a minute: 'Come on out, Jackal,' says Gondwa. 'I know you are there and I don't suppose you want to stay there all day! Just you run along home and stop thinking you are clever enough to catch old Gondwa. No one is clever enough to catch me!' And with that he retires, chuckling, into his cave and I trot home feeling ever so foolish."

"Poor Nkhandwe," said Kalulu. "But, of course, Gondwa was right! A Crocodile's egg miles from the river . . . well, I mean to say! It was a bit suspicious, wasn't it?"

"Yes, I see that now. But it did seem a good idea at the time!"

"Never mind! I will think of a plan," said Kalulu. "And if I do catch Gondwa, you shall have some of the beans."

Next morning Kalulu got up very early, called his Dog and his Goat, and went to Gondwa's cave. As he got near he began to whistle in a care-free way. And when he got very close he tied the Dog to one tree and the Goat to another, and in front of the Dog he put a bundle of grass, and in front of the Goat he put a plate of porridge. Then he lay down under a thorn tree and closed his eyes and when, a little later, a passing Sun-bird wished him "Good morning," the only answer Kalulu gave was a gentle snore.

The sun rose higher and higher; the day grew hotter and hotter; and Garu, the Dog, looked sadly at the bundle of grass in front of him (for he hated eating grass), and he gazed with longing at the bowl of porridge. And Mbuzi, the Goat, looked sadly at the bowl of porridge (for he hated eating porridge) and *he* gazed with longing at the grass, and he gave a little bleat of disgust.

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

Now Gondwa, the Iguana, had just finished his breakfast, and was wondering how soon he could have lunch, when he heard this odd little bleat. And he said to himself :

“ Bless my scales if that doesn’t sound like a Goat ! And what can a Goat be doing outside my cave ? I must go and see ! ” And he crawled forward and peered about him.

“ Well, if that isn’t the silliest thing ! ” he exclaimed. “ Who *can* have been so stupid ? Hi ! You there, with the long ears ! Are those poor creatures yours ? Don’t you know better than to give grass to a Dog and porridge to a Goat ? ” he demanded, but Kalulu made no answer and simply went on snoring.

“ Snakes and Crocodiles ! ” muttered Gondwa. “ Can he be deaf as well as brainless ? ” and he seized an egg-shell and threw it at the sleeping Rabbit. And because Gondwa *never* made mistakes, the egg-shell found its mark and Kalulu sleepily opened one eye and said :

“ Who did that ? And why ? ”

“ I did,” replied Gondwa. “ I just wanted to tell you that of all the foolish creatures I’ve ever come across—and there have been many—you are easily the most brainless. I thought everyone knew that Dogs ate porridge and Goats ate grass ! ”

“ Oh, no ! You are quite wrong ! ” said Kalulu. “ Dogs eat grass and Goats eat porridge.”

“ I’ve never heard such nonsense. I *know* you are wrong ! Why, you’ve only got to look at them ! The Goat hasn’t touched the porridge, nor has the Dog eaten any grass.”

“ Not hungry, I expect,” said Kalulu.

“ Goats and Dogs are always hungry ! Do you dare to think that you know better than I, you foolish Rabbit ? I, Gondwa, who never makes mistakes ? ”

“ Conceited, aren’t you ? ” said Kalulu austere. “ Certainly I think I know better than you in this matter. After all, they are my Dog and my Goat ! ”

“ You’re wrong, you’re wrong ! ” screamed the exasperated Iguana. “ I know I’m right ! I’m always right. I’ll prove I’m







## THE IGUANA WHO WAS ALWAYS RIGHT

right. I'll show you ! ” And he crawled down from his cave and hurriedly placed the bundle of grass in front of the Goat and picked up the porridge bowl. Just as he was giving it to the Dog he felt something flick against his neck. With a start and a sudden feeling of alarm Gondwa looked up. But it was too late. Kalulu had thrown a noose over the Iguana's head and, with a happy smile, the little Rabbit was saying :

“ A bag of beans, Gondwa ! A *big* bag of beans, you said, didn't you ? ”

Then and then only did Gondwa realise the trap into which he had fallen. Sadly he shook his head and murmured : “ Fancy *me* being caught like that—*me*, Gondwa, who *never* makes mistakes ! ” He sighed and looked wistfully round.

“ And I *don't* make mistakes,” he said suddenly, his voice brightening. “ Look at your Dog, Kalulu ! He is gobbling up the porridge, and the Goat is devouring the grass ! You see ? I *was* right ! ”





## THE HYENA'S SACK

"LATER than I thought," muttered Nkhandwe, the Jackal, with a quick glance at the rising sun. "But I may as well have a drink. After all, what does it matter if I *am* late? My wife will be so delighted when she sees what I have got!"

Nkhandwe was returning from the night's hunting, and had reached a little stream on whose banks grew great clumps of amaryllis and of yellow arums. In his mouth he carried a leafy bundle full of wild tomatoes. It was this that he knew would

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

be so welcome to Mkasi, his wife, and their three small children. Carefully he put it down at the water's edge, then stooped and drank his fill.

"Ah ! That's better," he said, shaking the glittering drops from his whiskers, and, picking up the precious bundle again, he trotted off in the direction of his home.

The Bees were beginning to stir and all the birds were singing by the time he reached it.

"Now," he thought happily, "now we shall see how pleased they are !" And he called out to his family : "Come quickly and see what I've got here. Such a treat !"

There was no answer.

"Mkasi !" he called again. "Children, where are you ?"

Still there was no answer.

"Mkasi !"

This time there was no mistaking the note of alarm in Jackal's voice. Again and again he called and ran urgently to and fro, searching for them, searching for anything that might tell him where they were.

Not a sound answered him, save the hum of countless insects and the rustle of the wind in the long grass. Not a trace of them could he find.

"There must be spoor," he told himself desperately. "Either they have run away or something has taken them. They can't have flown !" And he started to go over the ground again, more slowly and with even greater care.

Suddenly he stopped and stood staring with frightened eyes at a faint imprint in the dust. "Hyena's spoor !" he whispered. "Oh, what can have happened ?"

"Hullo, Jackal," a voice sang out, and Njuchi, the Bee, alighted on a nearby blade of grass. "Why, whatever is the matter ?" he asked, as he caught sight of Nkhandwe's anxious face.

Jackal told him and pointed to the tell-tale pug-mark.

"You see ? Fisi, the Hyena, has been here," he explained.



## THE HYENA'S SACK

"Fisi!" cried the Bee excitedly. "I saw Fisi half-an-hour ago! He was going towards the rocky mountains and he carried a sack—a bulgy sack. I wondered at the time what could be in it."

"Oh, my poor wife! My poor children!" wailed Nkhandwe. "Help me, Njuchi, help me to save them."

"Yes, yes, old fellow! Of course I will," replied Njuchi reassuringly. "Now let me think . . . supposing you start off on the mountain track while I go and collect all my relations from the hive? Then I can send our fastest scouts to fly ahead and look for Fisi and the rest of us will follow you." Njuchi spread his wings. "Don't you worry, Nkhandwe," he called as he flew off. "It will be all right. I'm sure it will! But there is no time to lose."

"No," agreed Nkhandwe dazedly, still gazing at the imprint in the dust. Then with a shake he pulled himself together and set off up the mountain path at a steady trot.

"Any news? Have you seen Fisi?" demanded Nkhandwe eagerly as one of the scouting Bees flew up. An hour or more had passed since the search began and up till now the Hyena had not been located.

"Yes, we've found him. He has just gone into a cave. One of the scouts has crawled in to watch what happens. Come quickly. I will lead you there." And away flew the Bee with Jackal galloping after him and Njuchi and all his relations flying in the rear.

As they neared the cave the Bee signalled to them to move quietly. Instantly Nkhandwe turned into the long grass, flattened himself, and started to crawl forward with the utmost caution, while the swarm of Bees settled on a rock. The scout himself dropped to the ground and crept into the cave in order to change places with the one already there.

A few moments later the second scout appeared and he and Njuchi flew to Nkhandwe's hiding place.

"All's well," he reported. "The sack is lying just inside the

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

mouth of the cave. I whispered as I passed that help was coming and, though I got no answer, I noticed an excited sort of wriggle in the sack."

"Good ! Whose cave is it ? " asked Jackal.

"It belongs to Fisi's brother. They are both in there now. I heard them talking."

"What did they say ? "

"Well, when Fisi first goes in, with me behind him, he drops the sack and flops down, saying :

" ' My goodness ! That sack's heavy ! I must have a rest.

" ' What have you got there ? ' asks his brother.

" ' Aha ! ' says Fisi, looking very pleased with himself. ' Something pretty good for dinner. Nice, fat, young Jackals ! ' and he licks his ugly chops and smirks with delight."

Nkhandwe shuddered and the Bee hurriedly went on.

" ' And how did you get hold of these nice fat, young Jackals ? ' asks the brother.

" ' Very cleverly, very cleverly ! ' replies Fisi, ' I stalked one as it was playing outside its home, and when it had its back turned I pounced upon it and popped it into my sack. Bye and bye another little Jackal comes to look for it and as soon as it gets near enough to me, in *it* goes into the sack. Same thing with the third Jackal, and then the mother comes to look for her children. Well, of course, I hadn't the heart not to take her too . . . ' This makes both the Hyenas laugh heartily. Then : ' Shall we eat them for dinner to-night ? ' the brother asks greedily !

" ' Oh, yes, I think so, don't you ? ' says Fisi. ' We might have a dinner party ! ' "

" ' Would there be enough for a party ? You don't think it would be better just to have a quiet little dinner by ourselves ? ' "

" ' I see what you mean, ' agrees Fisi. ' There would be more if we were only two. Yes, certainly, a quiet little dinner by ourselves ! ' "

" ' Brutes, ' muttered Nkhandwe angrily. " But we'll spoil their dinner for them."





## THE HYENA'S SACK

"Now's your chance then," a voice whispered, and the first scout joined the group. "Both Hyenas have fallen asleep, so you can easily get the sack out."

"Come on," said Nkhandwe, and like a flash he was into the cave and gnawing at the vine rope with which the sack was tied. In no time at all his sharp little teeth had bitten through it, and the four Jackals were set free.

"Don't make a sound," whispered Nkhandwe as they crept from the cave and out into the sunlight. Then he turned to thank Njuchi for his help.

"No, no, don't thank me," said the Bee. "Only too glad to have been able to help. But before you go, Nkhandwe, how would it be to put some stones in the sack and tie it up again? Then the Hyenas won't find out their loss till nearly dinner time."

"Why, yes, of course," agreed Jackal. "That is a good idea." Quickly they collected some stones and put them into the sack. Then the Jackals ran away home as fast as ever they could.

Njuchi, the Bee, did not follow them at once. There was something else he had to see to, and when it was done there was a happy smile on his face.

"Whatever is that dreadful noise?" asked three young Jackals, whose mouths were full of wild tomatoes, for they were in the middle of their dinner.

A terrible howling seemed to fill the night, and the whole party at Nkhandwe's home (Njuchi, and Kamba the Tortoise, and Kalulu, the Rabbit were all there), stopped eating to listen.

"It's those Hyenas," someone declared.

"So it is," agreed Njuchi with a chuckle.

"I never thought they'd make as much noise as that when they found their dinner gone," exclaimed Jackal in surprise.

"No," said Njuchi, "but then it isn't only that their dinner has gone! You see, after we'd put the stones in the sack and

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

you'd run home, I had another idea. I put all my relations into the sack as well, and . . . ” Njuchi paused as howl after howl echoed down the valley, “ . . . well, Bees will be Bees, and you know what they are like when they are angry ! ”





## THE TORTOISE AND THE HYENA

“MUSHROOMS !” exclaimed Kamba, the Tortoise, joyfully.  
“Do I see mushrooms? *Real* mushrooms?”

Yes, they were real mushrooms, little white, satiny, buttony mushrooms, with lovely pink underneath; little white mushrooms that had pushed all night at the dark brown earth above them, and had struggled through its hard crust just in time to see the sun rise, just in time to make a fine breakfast for a hungry Tortoise.

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

Happily, gratefully, Kamba ate first one and then another. So much was he enjoying them that he never even heard the tell-tale snapping of a twig in the "bush," and it was only when a gruff voice spoke beside him that he looked up apprehensively.

"What do you think you are doing?" the gruff voice said. It was the voice of Fisi, the Hyena, and anyone could have seen that he was in a very bad temper.

"Breakfasting," replied Kamba. "Off mushrooms," he explained. "Won't you have some?"

"Ugh!" growled Fisi, "Fancy eating those things! But you *would*, you stupid little Tortoise. I want meat!"

"Well, I'm very sorry . . ." began Kamba.

"And I haven't got any meat," Fisi went on angrily. "I haven't got any breakfast; and if I can't have breakfast, I don't see why you should!" With a furious growl Hyena pounced on the unfortunate Tortoise and wedged him into the fork of a tree as high above the ground as he could reach. Then:

"Ha! Ha! That makes me feel a little better," he said, and stalked off, chuckling nastily to himself.

"Hi! You can't leave me up here like this," cried Kamba in great agitation. "I can't get down. I can't move. Come back, Fisi, and put me down!"

But Fisi only laughed a little louder and in a minute or two he had disappeared out of sight and out of earshot.

"Well!" spluttered Kamba, nearly bursting with indignation. "Never in all my life . . . why should he treat me like this? I've never done him any harm . . . and what *am* I going to do now?"

He struggled for a while, but his shell was firmly wedged and he couldn't move an inch. That was no good. So:

"Help!" he cried. "Help! It's me, Kamba! Help!"

There was no answer.

"Oh, dear!" he thought. "This is dreadful. Surely someone must come along soon?"

Hours passed, but still no one came. Kamba began to feel

## THE TORTOISE AND THE HYENA

thirsty. Hungry, too, because he'd been interrupted before he'd had half a dozen of those delicious mushrooms that he could see nestling in the short young grass so far below him. It was too tantalising !

Suddenly there was a rustle in the undergrowth.

"At last," thought Kamba, as a Leopard appeared. It was a very plain Leopard, not a bit good-looking, and it had no fine spots on its coat, because in those days Leopards didn't.

"Here !" called Kamba urgently. "I say !"

The Leopard looked up.

"Hullo !" he said. "I didn't know you could climb trees."

"Oh, Nyalugwe, I *am* glad to see you. Fisi, the Hyena, stuck me up here and I can't move. I've been here for hours, and I'm so hungry and thirsty."

"Poor little Kamba ! What a shame ! Fisi is a wicked, evil creature. But you'll be all right now," and reaching up, Nyalugwe lifted Kamba gently out of the tree and put him on the ground.

"Thank you, Nyalugwe. Thank you very much indeed. Now I will show you how grateful I am. I will make you as beautiful as you have been kind."

"Oh, I should like to be beautiful," cried Nyalugwe eagerly.

"Can you really do that for me ?"

Tortoise nodded his head. Then he began to crawl slowly round the Leopard, muttering as he went :

"You shall be as beautiful  
As you have been kind.  
You shall be as beautiful  
As you have been kind."

And when he had made three complete circles round Nyalugwe, the Leopard's face had become as handsome as handsome, and his coat had become as silky as silky, and it was all covered with wonderful black spots. Truly he had become the most beautiful of creatures.

"There !" said Kamba, when Leopard was quite finished,

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

"Now off you go to where the men are hoeing in the fields. Show yourself to them and we'll see what they think of you."

Away went Nyalugwe as quickly as he could. When he reached the maize fields he climbed up on to the top of an anthill and almost at once a man spied him there.

"Ai!" cried the man. "Ona! Ona! Look! Look!" And all the people dropped their hoes and ran to see the Leopard.

"How handsome! How beautiful!" they exclaimed. "Is it not the finest creature ever seen? Can we not catch it and tame it?"

But Nyalugwe had no intention of being caught, so, while the men were all talking together and wondering how to capture him, he crept down from the anthill and bounded away back to where he had left the Tortoise.

"Well? What did they think of you?" asked Kamba. "Did they think you beautiful?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Nyalugwe happily. "They said I was handsome. They said I was the finest creature ever seen."

"That's all right then," and Kamba thanked Leopard again for his help, and Leopard thanked Kamba, and they parted, both feeling very pleased indeed.

Nyalugwe had not gone far before he met Fisi, the Hyena, who was muttering and grumbling to himself, and still in a very bad temper. When he saw Nyalugwe he stopped in amazement and stood gaping at him.

"I say!" he exclaimed at last. "Where did you get those lovely spots? How did you get like that? You used to be as plain as plain, and now you are wonderful—at least . . ." hurriedly Fisi pulled himself together. It would never do to go telling anyone that they were wonderful! For a moment he had been carried away by sheer surprise and admiration. ". . . well, your new coat is really quite handsome and your appearance much improved," he said, and added spitefully: "It needed improvement!"

"Oh?" said Nyalugwe coldly. "Well, let me tell you that





## THE TORTOISE AND THE HYENA

it isn't only your appearance that needs improvement. What you want is manners. You'd better see if Tortoise can't give you some."

"Tortoise? That miserable little Kamba? What's he got to do with it?"

"It was Tortoise who made me beautiful," answered Nyalugwe as he stalked off.

"Oho!" said Fisi to himself. "In that case Tortoise can make *me* beautiful too. I'll go and find the little wretch at once."

"Did you make that Leopard beautiful?" he demanded as he walked into the clearing where the mushrooms grew. Kamba's breakfast had become his lunch, and somehow the mushrooms tasted even better after all that long wait.

"Yes," he said in answer to Fisi's question.

"Well, then, make me beautiful—more beautiful than Nyalugwe, or I'll break that ridiculous shell of yours into a hundred pieces."

Tortoise's eyes narrowed, and with his head on one side he looked steadily at Fisi for a whole minute.

"All right," he said at last, nodding his head. Then he began to crawl in circles round the Hyena, and as he went he muttered to himself, so low that Fisi could not hear a word:

"You shall be as ugly

As you have been unkind.

You shall be as ugly

As you have been unkind."

And when he had made three complete circles round the Hyena, Fisi had become quite the ugliest creature in the whole of Africa.

"There!" said Kamba, when he had finished. "Now go and show yourself, as Leopard did, to the people who are hoeing in the fields. Then we shall see what they think of *you*."

Off went Fisi at a run, and to himself he thought:

"I expect they'll say I'm the most beautiful animal in all the world. I expect they'll think I'm absolutely wonderful." And

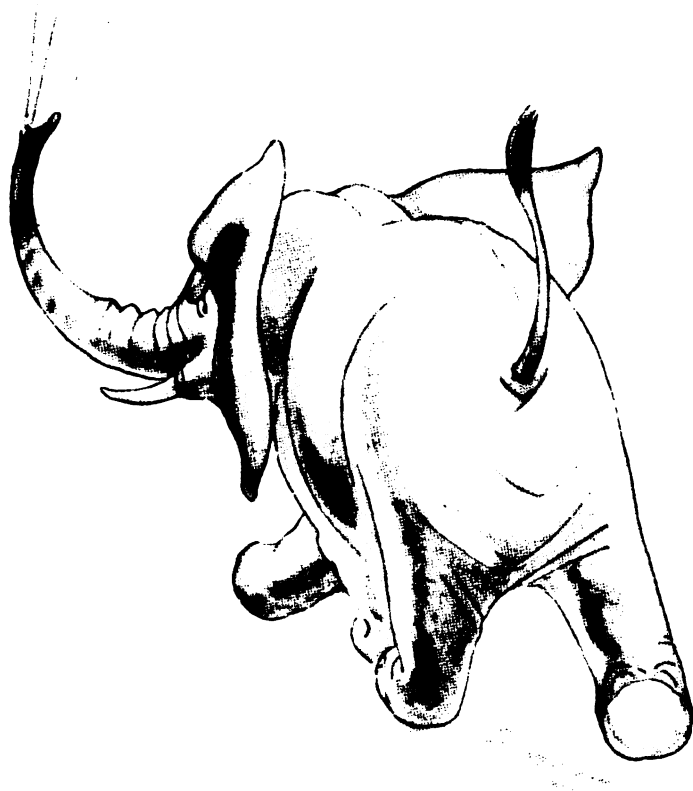
## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

when he reached the maize fields he climbed up on to the anthill so that everyone should see how handsome he was.

“Ai !” cried the men the moment they spied him. “Ona, ona ! Look, look ! What a horrible animal ! Is it not the ugliest creature ever seen ? Come, let us drive it away !” And they chased the Hyena with sticks and threw stones after him as he fled back into the “bush,” back to where he had left the Tortoise. There was only one thought in Fisi’s head. He’d get even with that Tortoise. He’d smash that Kamba’s shell ! He’d settle him !

But, oddly enough, Kamba was nowhere to be found. And Fisi was not to know that he was hiding in a hole in the rocks, watching all the time, for the hole was far too small even to be noticed by a great, big, ugly Hyena.





## THE QUARREL

“CHE ! Che ! Cheka, cheka, che !” sang the Honey-Guide, as he flew in and out of the trees that grew beside the narrow track through the “bush.” “Che ! Che ! If you want honey, I can guide you to it !”

“Honey ?” said a youth who was walking along. “I should like some honey. I will follow you. Lead on Nsadzu.”

So the little grey bird darted on and the youth, whose name was Ndodo, followed him. And they had not gone very far when

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

they saw Tambala, the Cock, who was scratching about in the path in search of food.

"Good morning," said Tambala. "Where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"To get some honey," answered Ndodo.

"Honey? In a honey comb?"

Ndodo nodded.

"Then I'm coming with you," and Tambala gave a loud crow, just to show how pleased he was, and ran along behind the youth and the Honey-Guide.

The track wound on, twisting and turning through the trees and scrub. On either side grew yellow daisies and tall grass, with here and there a lovely purple iris or a wild larkspur. Suddenly a Bush-cat dropped from a tree, stopped abruptly in the middle of the path and demanded to know where the Youth and the Cock and the Honey-Guide were all going.

"To get some honey," said Ndodo promptly. "Do you want to come too?"

"*Do* I want to come!" exclaimed Bush-cat. "What a question! Why, honey is my favourite food." And she licked her lips and scuttled along beside Tambala, murmuring ecstatically to herself the one word: "Honey."

A little further on they saw a Duiker breakfasting off the tender leaves of the Dema shrub.

"Morning, Duiker," said Ndodo, as he passed.

"G'Morning," replied Duiker with his mouth full. "Where are you going with Nsadzu, and Tambala, and Bush-cat, if I may ask?"

"We are going to get some honey."

"Oho!" said Duiker. "In that case I'm coming with you. Who wants leaves for breakfast when there's honey to be had?"

Chattering of this and that they hurried on, down a gully and across a stream, and there, at the water-hole, was Nyalugwe, the Leopard, drinking his fill. He lifted his head and looked at the little party.

## THE QUARREL

"Hullo ! Hullo !" he said. "What's all this about ? Where are you off to in such a hurry ? You, and Nsadzu, and Tambala, and Bush-cat, and Duiker ?"

"To get some honey," came the answer.

"Indeed ?" said Nyalugwe. "Then I think that I will come with you," and he climbed gracefully up the bank of the stream and stalked along beside Duiker.

Further on they were joined by Nchefu, the Eland, and Mkango, the Lion, and while Ndodo was telling them about the honey, they heard an indignant snort close by and saw Njobvu, the Elephant, coming slowly towards them, waving his trunk to and fro.

"What's all this noise ?" he demanded crossly. "Never heard anything like it. If you *must* talk, why can't you talk quietly ? You woke me up just when I was having a most refreshing sleep."

"Sorry, Njobvu, but we didn't know you were there."

"Where are you going, you and Nsadzu, and Tambala, and Bush-cat, and Duiker, and Leopard, and Eland, and Lion ?"

"We are going to get some honey. Would you like to come too ?"

"Honey ? Did you say 'honey' ?" asked Njobvu, a slow smile spreading all over his wrinkled face. "*Would* I like to come, too ! Of course ! I am coming."

The Honey-Guide flew on and the little procession followed with Njobvu, the Elephant, bringing up the rear. Suddenly Nsadzu settled on the branch of a tree.

"Che ! Che ! Cheka, cheka, che !" he sang again. "If you want honey, here it is !"

And there, sure enough, was the honey—four beautiful waxy combs of golden-brown honey.

Quickly Ndodo made four little platters from the bark of the tree, and when he had extracted the honey-combs, oh so carefully, he put one comb on each platter. The first he gave to the Cock and the Bush-cat ; the second to Duiker and Leopard ;

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

the third, to Eland and Lion ; and the fourth he kept for himself and Njobvu, the Elephant.

"Come now, let us eat," he said.

Then the Cock started to scratch at his end of the comb, and Bush-cat started to lick at hers ; and Duiker ran his long tongue all round the second comb, while Leopard clawed at it ; and Eland chewed and chewed at her end of the third comb, while Lion tore a great piece off with his teeth ; and in less than no time they had all grown very angry and stopped eating. Bush-cat simply bristled all over with indignation.

"Really !" she said to the Cock. "What a disgusting way to eat—scratching with your talons like that ! Have you no manners, Tambala ? Don't you know how to eat properly ?"

"I like that !" exclaimed Tambala, angrily fluffing up his feathers. "You're a nice one to talk ! What do you think you are doing, licking the honey-comb all over and making it quite unfit for a decent bird to eat ?"

"I flatter myself that my manners are as good as anybody's," said Bush-cat stiffly, "and . . ."

"You *do* flatter yourself, then," retorted Tambala.

"Oh ! How dare you !" with a scream of rage, and extended claws, Bush-cat struck out at the Cock, who ducked and did his best to peck her in return.

Meanwhile, Nyalugwe, the Leopard, was objecting very strongly to the way in which Duiker ate, and Lion was objecting to the way in which Eland ate and very soon they, too, were quarrelling and fighting.

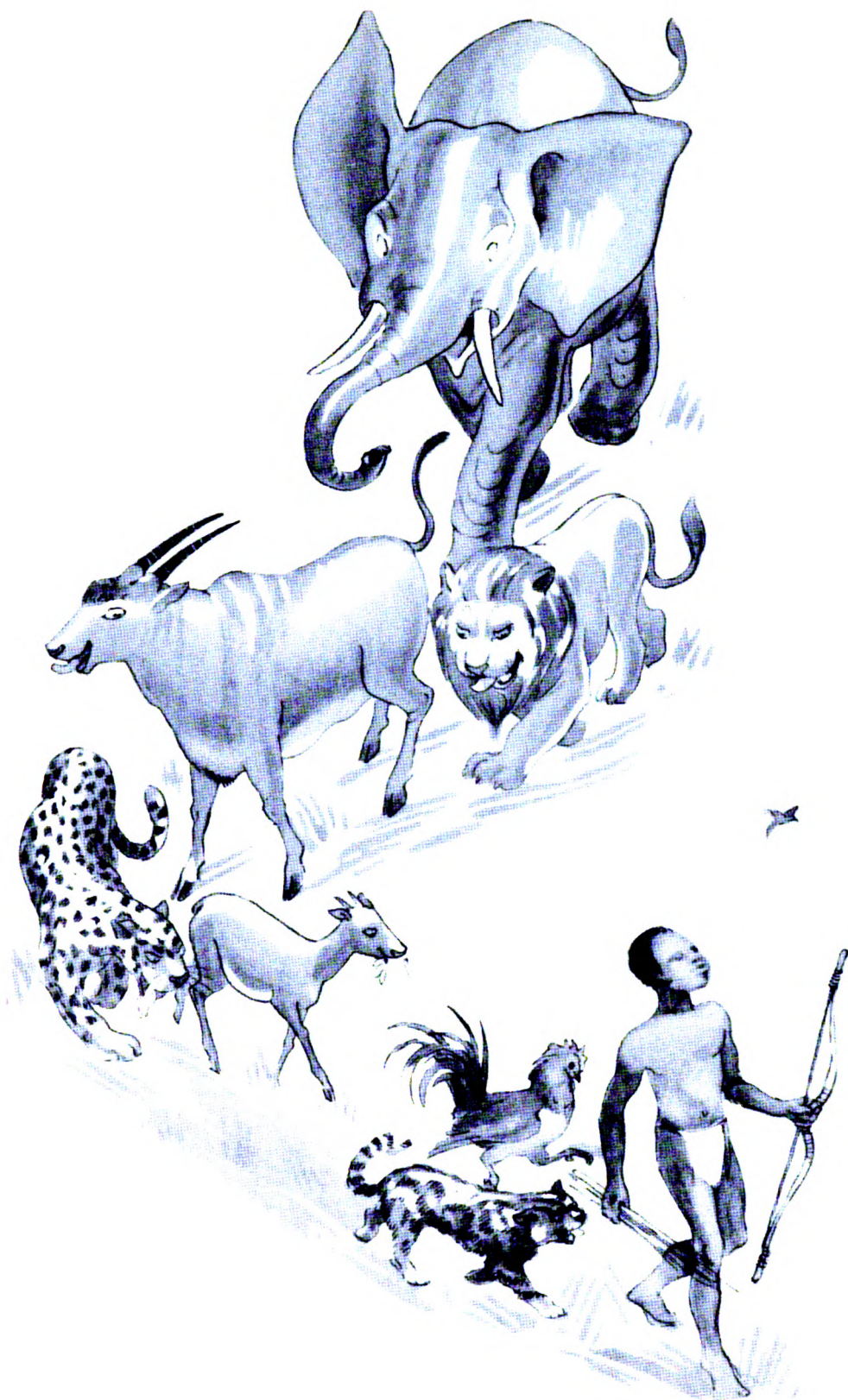
"My friends ! My friends !" cried Ndodo. "You must not quarrel like this ! Make up your differences, I beg of you, and let us eat our honey in peace."

"I won't eat with Tambala," cried Bush-cat at once.

"I won't eat with Duiker," snarled Nyalugwe, the Leopard.

"I won't eat with Eland," roared Mkango, the Lion.

"And I won't eat with you," said Njobvu, the Elephant, and





## THE QUARREL

he seized the honey-comb in his trunk, popped it into his mouth and ate the whole of it himself.

Then Ndodo was very angry indeed and he picked up his bow and arrow (which he'd put down beside the tree of the honey-combs) and, fitting an arrow to it, he took aim at the Elephant.

"Now," he said, in a voice of thunder, "this is the first time that there has been quarrelling amongst us. I do not like it and I intend to be obeyed. If you do not stop fighting at once, I will shoot."

At that the animals did stop, and in silence they looked at Ndodo and his bow and arrow. Then :

"Very well," said Njobvu, crossly. "We will stop fighting, but from now on we shall never cease to be enemies, Tambala and Bush-cat, Duiker and Leopard, Eland and Lion, and myself and Man." And, as if he were uttering a challenge, he trumpeted loudly, turned, and disappeared into the "bush," while the other animals all ran away in different directions.

Ndodo sighed. Then he looked sadly at the ruined honey-combs.

"Che ! Che ! Cheka, cheka, che !" sang the Honey-Guide above him. "If you want honey, I will lead you to it ! But do not bring others with you. This time you and I will go alone !"

Still singing gaily, the little grey bird flew off. After a moment's pause Ndodo followed.







## THE WELL

“THERE is going to be a drought,” announced Kamba, the Tortoise, one evening when all the animals were gathered round the water-hole.

“Nonsense, old Pessimist !” scoffed Kalulu, the Rabbit, and the other animals laughed.

“It isn’t nonsense. The rains will not break till late this year. We should be wise to dig a well.”

“Oh, don’t be silly, Kamba,” said Kudu, and changed the conversation.

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

It was spring-time and the trees were gloriously arrayed in gold and crimson, for gold and crimson is the livery of spring in Africa. Soon they would be changing colour and the hillsides would be clothed in green, while all the valleys would be gay with flowers. Then the rains would come, as they always had, to fill the streams and rivers, and every water-hole would be brimming over. Of course it was nonsense to talk of digging a well !

But Kamba did not think so. In his bones he knew that there *was* going to be a drought, and if the others didn't believe it, that couldn't be helped. The only thing to do was for him to dig the well himself. The time would come when they would be grateful and glad enough to use the water !

So next day Kamba, his wife and all his children started to dig. From sunrise to sunset they worked and, at the end of the day, there was a fine little hole in the ground.

"Are you digging a well ?" asked Ngaluwe, the Bush-pig, when Tortoise arrived at the water-hole that evening.

"Yes," replied Kamba.

"You are ?" Bush-pig laughed incredulously. "How deep is it ?"

"About *so* deep," answered Kamba proudly, indicating a short grass that grew close by.

"Is that all ? You will have to work hard if you are going to finish it in time !"

"I intend to work hard," said Kamba.

Next day, before even the pale mists of dawn had vanished from the valleys, the Tortoise family were at the well, digging, scratching, scraping away at the earth, until the hole was deep enough for Kamba to stand in on his hind legs and still not see over the top.

"How's the well getting on ?" asked Kudu, that night, at the water-hole.

"Splendidly," said Tortoise.

"How deep is it ?"





## THE WELL

"About *so* deep," replied Kamba, pointing to a quite tall grass.

"Is that all? At that rate you won't finish it until . . . until . . ." Kudu paused and tried to work out just how long it ought to take to finish the well. Finding it much too difficult, she hurriedly said: "Oh, you won't finish it for ages. It'll take a terribly long time!"

But Kudu was wrong. The well was finished much sooner than even Kamba had expected. For, on the twenty-first day, as they were digging, the Tortoise suddenly noticed that the earth was getting quite moist and before long they discovered the reason why. A little spring was bubbling up, right in the very middle of the well.

It was almost too good to be true. A *real* spring in the middle of their well! Now they would never want for water.

When the other animals heard the news, they, too, were quite excited and hurried along to have a look.

"You must build a little shelter over your well, so that the sun shall not cause the spring to run dry," said Kalulu, the Rabbit, and he even went so far as to help by bringing some sticks, and Kudu brought grass, so that the shelter was soon built and by the twenty-fifth day all the work was finished.

That night, as Kudu remarked, there was very little water left in the water-hole.

"If the rains don't break when they should," she said, "we may be very glad of your well, Kamba."

"Yes," agreed Tortoise. "And the rains won't break. They won't break for a long time."

The little Tortoise was right. Weeks passed and never a drop of rain fell, never was there even a distant rumble of thunder. The streams dried up; the pools dried up; the water-holes dried up; and the water in Tortoise's well gradually began to dwindle.

It dwindled much faster than it should. Each animal was only allowed to draw a certain amount each day, but far more

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

than that was disappearing. There could be no question of it. Someone was stealing the water !

"What shall we do, Njobvu ?" Kamba asked the Elephant. "The water is being stolen and soon there will be none left. It is very serious."

"Indeed it is," agreed the Elephant. "There is only one thing to do. We must set a guard to watch. Then the thief will not be able to steal."

"Who shall be the guard ?"

"We will take it in turns."

"Whose will be the first turn ?"

"Yours, Kamba, and I will tell Bushbuck to relieve you when the shadows lengthen."

So Kamba, the Tortoise, kept watch by the well for four hours, and no one came near it. At the end of that time, Bushbuck arrived and told him to go and rest, while he, himself, went on guard.

Bushbuck kept watch very conscientiously. He walked all round the well three times and then turned and went three times round the other way. Then he sat down and had a short rest. When he'd been doing this for over an hour he saw Ngaluwe, the Bush-pig, coming towards him.

"Hullo !" Ngaluwe called out. "What are you doing ? Oh, of course, you are on guard ! Disgraceful, isn't it, that anyone should steal the water. Really . . . some of these animals ! . . . I say, you must be hungry ! Would you like some honey ?"

"I should indeed," answered Bushbuck. "Have you brought some with you ?"

"No. But I'll tell you what. There is some hidden in a hole in that rock over there. I'll keep watch for you while you go and get it."

"Oh, will you ? That is kind !" And Bushbuck trotted off to the rock and hunted about until he found the honey. Then, when he had eaten it, he returned to the well and again thanked Bush-pig for his kindness.

## THE WELL

"Don't mention it," said Ngaluwe with a smile, and, grunting a little, he disappeared behind a clump of bushes that grew close to the well.

Nothing else happened during Bushbuck's watch and while Eland was on guard only a few animals came and drew their exact ration of water. All the other watches of the night were uneventful, yet, in the morning, the water in the well had dwindled just as much as ever.

Kamba was very puzzled. He questioned all the animals who had been on duty. Bushbuck admitted that he had left his post for a few minutes, but Ngaluwe had kept watch while he was away and there had been no sign of a thief, then, or at any other time. Yet the water had most certainly gone !

Well, there was nothing for it but to keep an even closer watch and Njobvu, himself, took the first one of the day.

But nothing happened. And when Kalulu, the Rabbit, was on guard, only a few antelopes came to draw their water. It was after Leopard had been on duty for more than two hours that Bush-pig appeared and asked if he would like some honey.

"I will keep watch while you get it from the hole in that rock, over there," he said, and Leopard was delighted and ran away and golloped up the honey as quickly as he could.

"Thank you very much indeed," he said, when he returned to the well. "That was delicious."

"Don't mention it," said Bush-pig airily and with a smile he trotted off into the clump of bushes.

Next morning the water in the well was much lower than it should have been. Again Kamba questioned all the animals who had been on guard and they all vowed that no thief could possibly have come while they had been there. But when Kamba heard about Bush-pig and the honey he began to wonder, and an idea came into his head.

"Njobvu, he said, "would you mind keeping watch for the next half hour and seeing that all the animals draw their water supply for the day during that time? After that I will keep

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

guard myself for the rest of the day and all through the night.”

“Certainly,” said Njobvu and began issuing orders at once.

Kamba, the Tortoise, crawled hurriedly away and fetched his wife. To her he explained what he wanted done and then he went to the nearest Beehive and asked if he might have some wax. This the Bees gave him gladly enough, for they were fond of Kamba, and he carried it carefully back to the well and hid it in the bushes. Then he thanked Njobvu for keeping guard and told him to go and rest.

When all the animals were out of sight, Kamba asked his wife to watch the well while he hid in the bushes. Then he covered himself all over with the Bees' wax until he was quite unrecognisable and he sat down to wait. Hours passed and nothing happened, but towards evening, the Tortoise saw the Bush-pig coming towards them and Kamba could not help feeling a little quiver of excitement running all the way down his back underneath his shell.

“Ah, Mrs. Tortoise,” said Ngaluwe, “I see you are taking your husband's watch? Very tiring for you! I expect you are hungry? Wouldn't you like some honey?”

“Very much indeed,” replied Mrs. Kamba, looking extremely pleased. “Have you got some for me?”

“Well, there is some hidden in a hole in that rock over there. I'll keep watch for you while you go and get it.”

“Thank you so much,” said Mrs. Kamba as she hurried off.

As soon as she was safely out of the way, Ngaluwe slipped into the bushes and took his water-pot from the place where he had hidden it. Quickly he went and filled it at the well and, just as he was going to hide it again, a voice suddenly spoke from close beside him.

“You thief, you!” it said.

“Who are you? Where are you?” cried Ngaluwe in alarm, looking wildly around. At first he could see no one, then the most extraordinary object appeared. It was like nothing he had ever seen before and it filled Ngaluwe with terror.



## THE WELL

“ Go away ! ” he shrieked. “ Go away, you horrible thing ! ” and he kicked it with all his might.

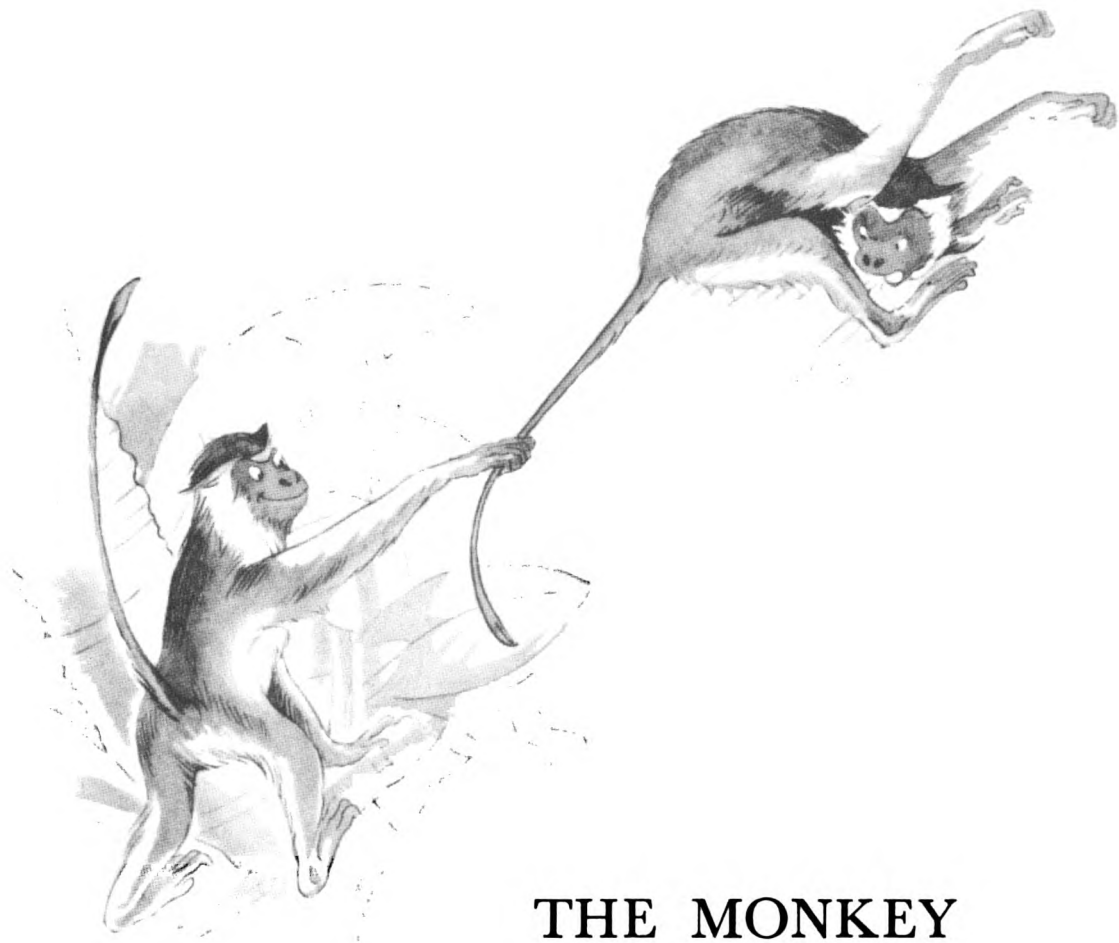
And then the awful thing happened. Ngaluwe found he could not move ! His trotters had stuck fast to the Peculiar Object. Try as he would he could not get them away and he was caught—caught red-handed in the act of stealing, for there was the pot of water to convict him.

“ It’s no good struggling,” said the Object. “ You can’t get away from me, and soon the others will be here. My wife has gone to fetch them and is not, as you think, eating your honey.”

“ Your wife ? ” said Ngaluwe in a whisper.

“ Yes. Haven’t you recognised me ? I’m Kamba, the Tortoise.”





## THE MONKEY AND THE HYENA

CHATTER, chatter, chatter went the little tree Monkeys in the cool depths of the forest—cool, even though the sun was shining fiercely ; dark even though the day was bright. For the trees of the forest were great with age and their branches interlaced and intertwined in a conspiracy to shut out all light. It was like being in a vast cathedral ; like living in perpetual twilight ; like moving in some great cavern of the sea where all things swam in dim veridian mystery.

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

Strange things grew there : ferns, orchids, creepers. Strange things lived there and never was there silence. All day long the Monkeys chattered, and the Turacos screeched, and at night the Owls hooted and every bush gave forth some secret rustle.

The Monkeys lived happily enough. They had a fine time, swinging through the tree-tops ; sliding down the giant lianas that hung from almost every branch ; pulling each other's tails. There was no end to their pranks and games. Only when the voice of an enemy could be heard did they pause in their play until they remembered that really they were quite safe, for what enemy could reach them ? Who could climb so high ? Certainly not Fisi, the Hyena, who was the greatest enemy they had !

Chatter, chatter, chatter ! The Monkeys were getting ready for a party. They were going to visit another colony of Monkeys who lived on the far side of the forest. Not all of them, of course. The smallest babies could not go and someone had to stay behind to look after them. Who should that someone be ?

"Nyonyo shall stay," said the Oldest-and-most-Important Monkey, severely.

"Why should it be me ?" demanded an indignant young voice.

"Because you had the impertinence to throw a bush-orange at me this morning, and . . ."

"Oh, it wasn't at you," Nyonyo burst out. "You know it was meant for Pusi !"

"Silence ! How dare you argue with me. In any case, I won't have you throwing things at my dear Pusi." And the old Monkey looked fondly at her son, who was a tiresome little wretch, disliked by almost every Monkey in the colony.

"Now, Nyonyo, mind you take good care of the babies, and let this be a lesson to you." With a magnificent gesture she gave the starting signal, and in a minute all the Monkeys, except Nyonyo and his charges, were swinging away gaily through the tree-tops at a tremendous pace.

Nyonyo made a grimace at their retreating forms and sat down and sighed.

## THE MONKEY AND THE HYENA

“ Well,” said he to himself, “ I’m sorry that bush-orange missed young Pusi but I’m glad now that it hit the old lady. It hit her hard, too ! ” And Nyonyo began to chuckle heartily at the recollection of the morning’s episode.

He was still chuckling when a voice hailed him from below.

“ Hey ! You little Monkey up there,” it said. “ You who are laughing so merrily. I want to join you. I want to come and play with you. If I hold on to this liana will you pull me up ? ”

Nyonyo stopped laughing and peered down through the dim green light. The underbush was very thick down there and he could see nothing.

“ Who are you ? ” he asked. There was just a shade of suspicion in his voice, for the voice below was harsh and gruff.

“ A friend. Pull me up, little Monkey. I do so want to come and play with you.”

“ What’s your name ? ” demanded Nyonyo again. He was getting more and more suspicious every moment.

“ Come on, pull me up ! ” said the wheedling voice.

Again Nyonyo peered down into the undergrowth. Was that an ugly great paw grasping the liana ? He couldn’t be sure, but quite suddenly he was absolutely certain whose was the ugly harsh voice.

“ Pull me up quickly ! ”

“ No, oh no, Fisi. I know you. I know your gruff, snarly voice. You don’t want to play with me. You want to eat me for dinner. I know you ! ”

“ What nonsense ! ” said the Hyena in the silkiest tones he could produce. “ Of course I wouldn’t do such a thing. I just want a game of catch.”

“ Yes, I know your sort of ‘ catch,’ but I’ve no intention of being caught ! Go away, Fisi, go away ! ” And the little Monkey seized a twig and threw it at the Hyena.

“ Grrr ! ” growled Fisi, furiously. “ I’ll pay you out for that. I’ll have you for dinner one of these days ! ”

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

“ Well, you’ll have to be a lot cleverer than you are at present,” Nyonyo retorted cheerfully, throwing down another twig. He was rather pleased with himself for not having been taken in and he felt quite safe up on his high branch. But he knew he’d feel still safer if Fisi would only go away.

After a few more growls and threats Fisi went. He went straight to his friends, the White Ants, for he wanted advice and the White Ants were very clever. There was nothing they didn’t know. How could he make his voice sweet and gentle, he asked? Well, it wouldn’t be easy, they replied, but if he rubbed his vocal cords with honey every night and every morning, his voice would undoubtedly improve. Could they let him have some honey? He didn’t like to ask the Bees because he wasn’t very friendly with Bees! Yes, the Ants would get some honey for him and he should have it on the morrow.

Fisi thanked them very much indeed and went back to his home in a fever of impatience. He longed to try the honey at once. If only it would sweeten his voice. If only it would be successful. Then he’d be able to deal with that Monkey!

A week passed. Twice every day Fisi had rubbed his vocal cords with honey and hundreds of times a day he had tried talking sweetly, softly, gently to himself. Sometimes he even went to the White Ants and said in a queer sort of husky, sticky, eager voice: “ Don’t you think my voice is sweet now?” And the White Ants would reply evasively: “ It certainly is improving. It is much less harsh.”

On the eighth day of treatment Fisi decided that he could wait no longer, so he went to the Monkey’s tree and called out as gently as he could:

“ Hey! Little Monkey! I’ve come to play with you. I’ve got a nice surprise for you. I’ll hold on to this liana and you can pull me up.”

Now it so happened that Nyonyo was again in charge of the baby Monkeys, for he had again got into disfavour with the







## THE MONKEY AND THE HYENA

Important Old Lady ; and at that moment there was nothing he wanted so much as someone to play with. What luck that someone had come along ! He was just going to pull up the liana when it occurred to him that he did not know who the someone was. The voice was not one he recognised.

“ Who are you ? ” he asked.

“ A friend,” replied Fisi.

“ Yes, but who ? And what’s wrong with your voice ? It sounds sort of sticky and husky.”

“ There’s nothing wrong with my voice,” answered Fisi indignantly and much less softly.

“ Isn’t there, though ? ” Nyonyo sat bolt upright. That last remark had had a familiar harshness in it. It was nearly as harsh as Fisi’s voice. Could it be Fisi himself ? Could it ? Well, he’d give a little pull at the liana and if the person at the other end was very heavy, Nyonyo would know that it *was* Fisi.

He gave a sharp tug. The weight on the liana was tremendous. If it wasn’t Fisi down there it was someone just as heavy and none of the other big animals ever came to call on the Monkeys. It must be Fisi ! Nyonyo hurriedly let go of the liana.

“ Ow ! ” yelled the Hyena, as he fell to the ground with a bump (and the harshness in his voice was very noticeable). “ You stupid little Monkey ! What did you do that for ? Come on, pull me up properly ! ”

“ Oh, no, Fisi ! I know you now. I know your voice and no one else could be so heavy. You’ll have to be a lot cleverer before you can catch me. Go away, Fisi ! ” And Nyonyo threw down a twig which caught the Hyena squarely on the nose and made him let out another sharp “ Ow ! ”

Fuming with rage and disappointment, Fisi stalked off and again went to see the White Ants. “ How could he get his weight down ? ” he wanted to know. “ By eating much less,” the White Ants told him, which did not comfort him at all. But all that week Fisi *did* eat less and every night and every morning

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

he still rubbed honey on his vocal cords. And on the eighth day he went again to the Monkey's tree and called out ever so softly, oh, so sweetly :

"Hey! You little Monkeys! Here's a kind friend come to see you. Quickly pull me up on the liana."

Now although some of the Monkeys were away visiting elsewhere in the forest, on this occasion both Nyonyo and Pusi were amongst those who had stayed behind, and it was Pusi who heard the soft, sweet voice.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"A friend. A kind friend who has got a lovely surprise for you."

"Ooh!" exclaimed Pusi excitedly. "Have you got a present for me?"

"Yes, of course I have. Pull me up quickly and you'll see."

"Come on, then," said Pusi and began to haul on the liana with all his might. "You do weigh a lot," he grumbled after a few seconds, and called to Nyonyo to come and help.

"Why do you want help?" asked Nyonyo.

"There's a friend down below with a present for me and he's very heavy."

"Who is it?"

"I don't know. Come and help when I tell you to!"

"Oho!" said Nyonyo. "Why should I do what *you* tell me? Just you find out who your friend is and then perhaps I'll come and help. It may be an enemy for all you know. It may be Fisi, the Hyena."

"As if I don't know Fisi's voice!" exclaimed Pusi, scornfully. "This is a sweet, soft voice, so don't be stupid. If you don't come and help at once I'll call my mother."

"I'm not going to pull up that liana until I know who is on it," said Nyonyo obstinately.

"Mamma! Mamma!" called out Pusi. "Nyonyo won't help me with this liana. He's jealous because there's a friend below who is bringing me a present."

## THE MONKEY AND THE HYENA

"Go and help my little Pusi at once," ordered the Important Old Monkey.

"Not till I know who is down there," answered Nyonyo. "It may be Fisi !"

"Do you think my clever little Pusi doesn't know the voice of Fisi, the Hyena ?" demanded the old lady shrilly as she swung down on to Nyonyo's branch and began to box his ears. But Nyonyo was too quick for her. He curled his tail round the branch and slid beneath, and the old lady, muttering angrily, went to help her son pull up the liana.

They pulled and they pulled, and Nyonyo still hung by his tail from the branch. Slowly the liana came up until, even in the dim twilight of the forest, Nyonyo could make out the large, ugly form of Fisi. The Hyena was clutching the liana tightly and on his face was an evil smirk of triumph.

"Let go," shouted Nyonyo in a panic. "It is Fisi ! Let go that liana or he will eat us all !"

But Pusi and his mother took no notice. They simply went on hauling steadily and Fisi was already more than half way up.

Desperately Nyonyo swung himself at the liana, grasped it in his paws and started to bite. It was very thick. Could he possibly bite through it in time ?

Nearer and nearer came Fisi, smirking wickedly and licking his lips. Suddenly he realised what Nyonyo was trying to do.

"Here ! Stop that !" he yelled. "Stop . . ." and at that moment the liana broke. With a tremendous crash, Fisi fell howling to the ground.

From every part of the tree Monkeys came hurrying, chattering with excitement, wanting to know what had happened. Nyonyo told them.

"Well done, Nyonyo !" they cried, "Well done ! You have saved us all ! Now *you* shall be our Leader."





## THE GUILTY FROG

“WHAT? No honey? Why isn’t there any honey?” demanded Njobvu, the Elephant, peevishly. “Really! I don’t know what things are coming to when a fellow can’t get a little honey for his breakfast!”

“Well, you see,” explained Nsadzu, the Honey-Guide, “if everyone eats honey every day, naturally the time comes when there is none left.”

“Why should it? Aren’t the Bees keeping up to the mark?”

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

"Certainly they are. But what with all the honey-combs that have been eaten and one thing and another, there aren't so many Bees as there used to be. And if everyone goes on eating honey every day . . ."

"Yes, yes ! You've already said that !" Njobvu waved an impatient trunk. "The point is, what are we going to do ? Something, I suppose, has got to be done ?"

The little grey bird nodded.

"Well ? What ?"

"Hadn't we better call a Meeting of All the Animals ? Then the whole question can be discussed and we can decide what steps are to be taken ?"

"Yes, that seems sensible," agreed the Elephant. "Call the Meeting for to-night—the bank above the water-hole will be the best place—two hours after sunset. Let everyone know at once." And, with an imperious gesture, Njobvu dismissed the Honey-Guide and began to search about for some tender tree shoots which would do for breakfast instead of the honey he had always had.

A golden moon was gazing at her reflection palely mirrored in the water-hole when, one by one, the Animals came down to drink that night. Nsadzu had done his work well and there was no one who had not heard about the Meeting.

"Dreadful about the honey, isn't it ?" said Chule, the Frog, plaintively. He had finished drinking at the same moment as Kamba, the Tortoise.

"I don't know what I shall do if I can't get honey !" Chule continued. "My favourite food—the only thing worth eating—and I haven't had any for days. Have you ?"

"No," said Kamba, "and I don't suppose we shall for a long time."

A sudden trumpeting sounded and all the Animals scuttled up the bank and settled themselves in a wide circle round the Elephant. The Meeting was about to begin.

"My friends," said Njobvu in his most pompous voice, "we







## THE GUILTY FROG

are gathered here to-night to decide what is to be . . . er . . . done about this . . . er . . . distressing Shortage-of-Bees-and-Honey. You may . . . er . . . all give your opinions, but, myself, I think that we should . . . er . . . make a law whereby no one except the . . . er . . . Largest and Most Important Animals should be permitted to eat any honey at all."

"Hear ! Hear !" cried Rhinoceros and Mvu, the Hippopotamus, delightedly ; but there was an indignant murmur from the Smaller Animals.

"Oh, no ! That won't do," shouted Chule, the Frog. "Why should the Smaller Animals be excepted ? Why not the Large Ones ? They eat much more than we do !"

"Hear ! Hear !" muttered all Chule's friends, while the middle-sized Animals (like the Antelopes) began to ask each other : "Where do we come in ? No one seems to be thinking of us !"

"Has anyone any other suggestion ?" asked Njobvu, coldly. "Chule's is, of course, absurd !"

"I don't see why !" cried Chule. "It's no more absurd than yours !"

"Silence !" roared Njobvu. "Now, has anyone . . . ?"

"Yes." Kamba, the Tortoise, gave a little cough and crawled forward.

"I would like to suggest that no one at all should eat any honey for a whole year. That will give the Bees time to increase their numbers and to make a great many new combs, and it will be equally fair to everyone."

In silence the suggestion was considered. Then Chule, the Frog, burst out :

"I *can't* do without honey for a whole year. I can't, I can't !"

"Pull yourself together, Chule," said the Elephant severely and all the Animals frowned at him and even his friends whispered :

"Shut up, Chule, you're making an awful idiot of yourself !"

"Kamba's suggestion seems an excellent one," said Njobvu

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

at last, "and if no one has any other proposal . . . ?" Njobvu paused, but as everyone was silent he went on, "we will now make a law that No Animal Whatsoever or Whomsoever shall eat Honey or Honey-comb for the space of one year. Do you all understand ?"

"Yes," said the Animals.

"And the Penalty for breaking this Law will be Death."

"Yes," whispered the Animals.

In solemn silence the Meeting broke up.

Weeks passed and the Animals got used to doing without honey. Many of them, in fact, quite lost the taste for it and have never eaten honey from that time to this. But Chule, the Frog, was not one of them. He pined for his honey. He could think of nothing else ; could talk of nothing else ; and gradually even his friends began to find him unbearable. He had only to see a Bee, to hear a buzzing noise, to at once start whining : "Oh, for some honey ! I shall die if I don't have some soon, I know I shall !" Which was all nonsense, because Chule was no worse off than anyone else, and his longing for honey was nothing but sheer greed.

So, as time went on, the Frog was left more and more to himself. He took to poking about in all sorts of out-of-the-way places, looking for Beehives, and, whenever he found one, he would tell the Bees to be sure to make as much honey as possible, and he would memorise the spot so that, at the end of the year, he could come back and collect all the combs for himself.

Then, one day, in a very wild and lonely part of the country, he found an old, old hollow tree, and in it there were so many honey-combs that his mouth began to water. And a little voice inside him whispered : "If you took one—just one—and ate it now, no one would know. Why don't you ?"

"Supposing someone saw you ?" said another voice, doubtfully.

"How could they ? Aren't you miles from anywhere ? Aren't you hidden inside a tree ? Well, then . . ."

## THE GUILTY FROG

"Yes," thought Chule, "it's quite safe!" But just to make sure he crept outside and had a good look round.

There was no one, nothing, not even a bird or a butterfly, not even a breath of wind. Quickly the Frog slipped inside the tree again, seized the nearest honey-comb and gobbled it up. There was an ecstatic look on his face, and as he finished he sighed with happiness and satisfaction. Wistfully he eyed the remaining combs . . . Should he . . . ? Better not risk it ! Some other day perhaps if all was well, as, of course, it would be.

Still licking his lips, Chule peeped out and, seeing everything exactly as it was before, he hopped cautiously under the nearest bush.

"Clumsy !" said a voice suddenly, from the very middle of the shrub. "What are you doing here ?"

Petrified with fright, his eyes bulging out of his head with terror, Chule looked desperately at the place the voice had come from. There *wasn't* anyone there, there *wasn't* . . . or was there ? A twig had moved and there had not been the tiniest puff of wind !

"Aren't you going to answer ?" said the Voice again, and there was no longer any room for doubt. The twig was running towards the horrified Frog, and Chule recognised the Stick Insect.

"What do you mean by coming into my bush and disturbing me like this ?" Stick Insect demanded furiously. "You wretched creature, what do you mean by it ?"

Chule tried to answer. But something had happened to his voice . . . he couldn't speak properly . . . he could hardly speak at all ! At last :

"So . . . or . . . ry," he managed, in a queer, trembly croak, utterly unlike his ordinary strong young voice. "So . . . or . . . ry, I . . . ." The Stick Insect glared at him.

"What's the matter with you ?" he asked. "You look as guilty as a thief !"

And at that Chule's nerve gave altogether. He turned and

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

fled—blindly—in any direction—it didn't matter where he went so long as he got away from the Insect who must have seen him come out of the tree ; the Insect who must know his guilty secret. It never occurred to the conscience-stricken Frog that Stick Insect might have been asleep and know nothing whatever, which was the case. Of course he knew, thought Chule. Had not the Insect called him a thief? Oh, why had he eaten that honey, why had he broken the law?

Heedless of everything, the wretched Frog ran on—unknowingly he had taken the track that led to the Big Pool in the river—and there, on the bank above the pool, he bumped into Kalulu, the Rabbit.

“Look where you are going, can't you?” said Kalulu, crossly.

“So . . . or . . . ry,” croaked the Frog, again in that queer trembly voice.

“Whatever is the matter with you, Chule?” Kalulu asked in surprise. Frog's eyes were still bulging with fright, and he was panting after his long run. No wonder the Rabbit was amazed.

“No . . . o . . . thing,” croaked Chule.

“Well, you couldn't look more guilty if you'd been stealing honey! Have you, Chule? Is that it?”

Kalulu's voice had become very stern and he took a step towards the trembling Frog.

It was more than Chule could bear. Casting one wild look at Kalulu, he dived into the pool, and there he remained for the rest of his life. His voice never recovered; his eyes never recovered; and all Frogs ever since then have had the same bulgy eyes, the same croaky voices, and always have they lived, for safety's sake, at the very bottom of ponds and pools, just in case their ancestor's guilt has not been forgotten.



## THE BROKEN FRIENDSHIP

“HI, THERE ! Stop, you thieves, stop ! How dare you come into my garden ! How dare you steal my maize !”

It was the voice of Kalulu, the Rabbit, shrill with anger, as he heard and saw the tell-tale rustling amongst the corn-stalks of his garden. Suddenly the marauders broke from cover, and, grunting with alarm, raced madly up the hill and disappeared into the thicket. For a moment Kalulu thought of giving chase, then he decided that it was not worth while.

“I know who those two were,” he muttered to himself, “so I may as well see how much damage they have done. I can deal with them later !”

“Ah ! Trampled my young beans, have they !” he continued wrathfully, as he made his examination, “and broken several

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

corn-stalks, *and* eaten the cobs ! It really is insufferable ! I must go and talk to N'Kaka, the Ant-bear, about this."

So Kalulu turned away from his plundered garden and scurried along the track that led to Ant-bear's burrow.

"Are you at home, N'Kaka ? Can I come in ?" he called out, without bothering to knock.

"Certainly, Kalulu. This is indeed a pleasure," replied the Ant-bear graciously. "Have you come about anything special, or is this just a friendly call ?"

"Well, both," answered Rabbit tactfully. "But I did rather particularly want to talk to you about Njiri, the Wart-hog. I know he is a friend of yours."

"What has Njiri been doing now, I wonder ?"

"Stealing," replied Kalulu, shortly. "I've just come from my garden and I caught him and Ngaluwe, the Bush-pig, eating my maize."

"What a shame !" exclaimed N'Kaka. "But you caught them, you say ? What have you done with them ?"

"Oh, not that sort of 'caught.' They got away. It didn't seem worth while to chase them."

"Probably not," agreed N'Kaka. "Of course it is all Ngaluwe's fault," she continued thoughtfully. "He always was a rascal, and Njiri is so foolish and weak. If only we could separate them—break their friendship somehow—it would be all right. Wart-hog is a good fellow really, but so long as he remains friends with that Bush-pig cousin of his, he'll only go from bad to worse. He is a foolish creature !"

"Won't he listen to you, N'Kaka ? He is very fond of you and generally takes your advice," said Rabbit.

"At the time, yes, Kalulu. Then he goes out, full of good intentions, accidentally meets Bush-pig, who proceeds to flatter him and remind him that they are cousins and that families should stick together—you know the sort of thing—and in no time at all Njiri is persuaded, and off they go together. Quite probably Ngaluwe told Njiri that it was his own garden they were







## THE BROKEN FRIENDSHIP

to visit, or else that he had permission from you to go there whenever he liked ! ”

“ I wouldn’t be surprised,” agreed Kalulu. “ I’m sure Wart-hog would not steal intentionally.”

“ Of course he wouldn’t ! He’s the most kind-hearted creature alive ! ”

“ Excepting yourself, N’Kaka,” said Rabbit with a smile.

“ Now then, Kalulu, you mustn’t flatter an old Ant-bear like me,” laughed N’Kaka delightedly. “ You know I enjoy helping people ! I’ll have another little chat with Njiri this evening—though I doubt if it will do any good—and you see if you can’t think of some way of breaking off this most undesirable friendship.

“ I will, N’Kaka, I will ! We simply must save Njiri from Ngaluwe, or goodness knows where the poor old fellow will end up ! I’ll see what I can do. Goodbye, N’Kaka, and thank you so much.”

“ Goodbye, Kalulu,” replied the Ant-bear.

Three days later Njiri, the Wart-hog, was sitting at the mouth of one of N’Kaka’s burrows, thinking of nothing in particular, when he heard a grunt and out of a nearby thicket trotted Ngaluwe, the Bush-pig.

“ Just the person I was looking for ! ” exclaimed Ngaluwe, cheerfully. “ I want you to come on a little jaunt with me, Cousin Njiri.”

“ I’m very sorry, Ngaluwe, but I mustn’t come,” replied Wart-hog.

“ Mustn’t come ? How do you mean ‘ mustn’t ’ ? ”

“ N’Kaka says I mustn’t. She says you are a Bad Influence. She says you are a Thief and a Rascal, and that you lead me into Shocking Ways. So I mustn’t go out with you any more.”

“ N’Kaka is an interfering, wicked old Ant-bear. Trying to turn you against your poor cousin ! I’ve never heard of anything so unkind,” said Ngaluwe indignantly. “ Besides, what am I going to do without you, Njiri ? I shall be so lonely, so unhappy !

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

You can't desert me, truly you can't. I shall be lost without you," he continued, with a well-calculated catch in his voice, though to himself he thought : " What a tiresome, foolish creature Wart-hog is ! But I must have *someone* to help me and to keep a look-out when I'm raiding people's gardens. And no one else is as stupid as Wart-hog. I couldn't fool any of the others in the same way ! "

" You will come, won't you, Njiri ? " Bush-pig pleaded again. " I simply can't do without you ! "

" Oh, dear ! Oh, dear ! What am I to do ? " asked Njiri. " I did say I wouldn't go out with you again, and I don't like to break my word or hurt N'Kaka's feelings."

" But you don't mind hurting *my* feelings ! " Ngaluwe pointed out. " You don't mind deserting your poor cousin or believing wicked stories about him. I'm surprised at you, Njiri ! I'd always looked up to you so—thought you so kind and good—so wonderful. I never thought *you'd* let me down."

" Oh, I won't Ngaluwe ! I'll come with you—I can't bear to see you so unhappy. But I don't know what N'Kaka will say," and the harrassed Wart-hog sighed dolefully.

" Where are we going ? " he asked a little later, as they were trotting off in the direction of the gardens.

" I'll tell you when we get there," answered Bush-pig.

They had not gone very far when they met Kalulu, the Rabbit. Naturally they would have liked to hurry by, but Kalulu would not let them.

" I want a word with you, Njiri," said Rabbit in a friendly voice, " in private," he added with emphasis. " Perhaps you would ask your friend to wait for us a little further along the track ? Out of earshot ! "

" Er . . . would you mind, Ngaluwe ? " said the puzzled Wart-hog uncomfortably.

" I certainly shall not stay where I'm not wanted," said Bush-pig stiffly and, with a glare at Kalulu, he moved off.

" Well," inquired Njiri, " what is it ? "

## THE BROKEN FRIENDSHIP

"I just wanted to ask you if you didn't think it was a lovely evening," whispered Kalulu confidentially in Wart-hog's ear.

"Very pleasant," agreed Njiri in some surprise.

"It was a lovely morning, too, wasn't it?" said Rabbit, still in a whisper, and even more confidentially.

"Yes, wasn't it?" replied Wart-hog, with even more surprise.

"And I should think it would be very fine again to-morrow," continued Rabbit earnestly. "Well, goodbye, Njiri. I'm so glad to have met you."

"Goodbye, Kalulu," answered Wart-hog, by now completely bewildered. What on earth did Rabbit want to make so much fuss for if he was only going to talk about the weather, he wondered as he trotted off to join the waiting Bush-pig.

"Don't forget what I told you!" shouted Rabbit at the top of his voice. "Mind you don't forget. It is very important," and he disappeared into the long grass.

"What did Kalulu tell you?" demanded Bush-pig at once.

"Nothing! Nothing at all!" answered Njiri.

"But he did! I saw him whispering in your ear, and you looked very surprised. What did he say?"

"Nothing! He just talked about the weather."

"About the weather, indeed!" exclaimed Ngaluwe in complete disbelief. "As if he'd have made all that fuss if he wanted to talk about the weather! Tell me at once what it really was, Njiri!"

"I've told you," replied Njiri stiffly. "If you don't believe me, that's not my fault!"

"Of course I don't believe you, you stupid, ugly Wart-hog! Didn't I hear Rabbit say it was important?" screamed Bush-pig furiously. Then seizing a stick, he cried: "If you don't tell me at once, I'll beat you till you do!"

"Oh!" squeaked Wart-hog in alarm. "Oh, no!" and he turned and ran back as fast as he could along the way that they had come. And as he ran, he shouted to Ngaluwe:

"I've finished with you, Bush-pig! N'Kaka was right—you

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

*are* bad—and I'm never going to be friends with you again—even if you are my cousin ! ”

With a grunt of rage, Ngaluwe threw his stick upon the ground and trotted off angrily in the opposite direction. From somewhere in the grass nearby a chuckle sounded. Kalulu, the Rabbit, was laughing happily to himself.



## THE ANTELOPE'S PARTY

“ You can't go to a Party if you haven't been asked.”

“ Can't I ? ” said Kalulu, the Rabbit confidently. “ I can if I want to ! ”

“ You can't,” protested Kamba, the Tortoise again.

“ Of course you can't,” said Mrs. Kamba in her matter of fact way. “ If Antelope had wanted you he would have invited you, and it is Not Done to push yourself in where you are Not Wanted.”

“ I don't care,” said Kalulu, “ I shall go, and I shall be a great success. Hulloo ! ” he exclaimed suddenly, jumping to his feet and sniffing the air. Instantly the Tortoises became alert and began to sniff too. Then :

“ Fire ! ” they cried together. “ Fire ! We must run ! ”

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Then came an ominous crackling sound in the grass close by. A brave Msuku leaf that had that day unfurled its fresh young greenness to the morning sun, shrank at the first searing, wind-borne breath, turned grey, and fluttered lifeless to the ground. From out a nearby patch of scrub a Leopard sprang, a cub in her mouth, and fear in her eyes, and raced off madly, down-wind. Other animals followed, scuttling desperately for safety, and in their wake came the scorching, leaping flames, destroying everything that lay in their path.

On raced the creatures of the "bush"; on raced the fire driven by the careless, cruel wind, and on raced Kalulu, the Rabbit. His friends, the Tortoises, had crawled under the first rock that offered shelter, but there had been no room for him and he was making for the river, for there the reeds were still too green to burn, and after such a run he needed water. Without pausing in his flight Kalulu turned his head to look for a moment at the line of fire—the wind had veered a little and the flames were dancing away towards the west—and in that moment the Rabbit tripped and fell. The whole world became black and full of stars.

Gradually the stars faded. Kalulu blinked his eyes and put a bewildered paw to his aching head. What had happened? He looked around him. Ah! There had been a fire. He had been running down-wind to the river and something had tripped him up. What, then, was that something? He took another look round.

"Well! Well!" he exclaimed. "A pair of Antelope horns. What an odd thing to find! Antelope horns?" he continued thoughtfully. "Now those ought to be useful," and he walked slowly round them, thinking deeply. Suddenly he began to grin. "But of course!" said he to himself ecstatically. "It's too easy! All I want is some bees-wax, and that is quite simple. I'll go at once and get some from Njuchi, the Bee."

From the black shadow of a tall Mbewe tree, Mpalapala, the

## THE ANTELOPE'S PARTY

Sable Antelope, stepped haughtily into the moonlit valley where his guests were already assembled.

"Ah, Kudu ! I am so glad you could come," he said graciously. "And Bushbuck ! How nice to see you looking so well," and he moved slowly on, greeting all the different kinds of Antelope in turn. Then he went to his brother who was to act as Sentry, and told him to be sure to keep good watch.

"We don't want Lion to catch us unawares. Can't have any trouble of that sort. And we don't want outsiders ; this is a family affair, and only Antelopes are invited, so don't let anyone else come butting in."

Half an hour later, when the Party was in full swing, a quaint little creature came trotting up to the Sentry. It had a furry coat and long ears and a fine pair of Antelope horns. As it came towards him the Sentry wondered what it could be. Certainly he had never seen anything like it before.

"Afraid I'm a bit late," it said. "Had to go a long way round because of the fire."

"Who are you ?" demanded the Sentry. "What do you want here ?"

"Do you mean to say you don't know who I am ?" The newcomer looked so surprised. "I'm your cousin," he explained, "and I've come to the Party."

"Were you invited ?"

"All Antelopes were invited, weren't they ?"

"Y-e-s," said the Sentry with some hesitation. "But . . . are you sure you *are* an Antelope ?"

"Well ! What a question ! Haven't I got Antelope horns ?"

"Yes, yes, those are undoubtedly our horns. I suppose it is all right." And the Sentry shook his head rather dubiously as the odd little creature with the long ears (but undisputed Antelope horns) skipped off to join the other guests.

Most of them were too busy enjoying themselves to take any notice of the newcomer, though one or two blinked their eyes a little and thought : "Well, that's a very peculiar Antelope

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

. . . I suppose it is an Antelope ? . . . Oh, yes, of course it must be—the horns are right,” and they went on eating again, for it was a wonderful Party, one of the best Parties ever known. It lasted till the moon went down, it continued till the stars grew pale, even when the dawn broke and a red sun rose, heralding the new day, the guests were still there, making merry, and only the older Antelopes were beginning to think of sleep.

But there was one exception. One guest—an odd little Antelope who had arrived late and had meant to leave quite early—had fallen asleep long before the first faint glimmering of light appeared in the sky. For he was very tired. He had run so fast from the fire, he was worn out with all the excitement—and he had eaten such an enormous supper ! So he had fallen asleep (quite happily, because he had never enjoyed a Party so much in all his life), and he slept and he slept, and he was still sleeping when the sun was shining brightly and the day was growing warm.

It was Bushbuck who first noticed him. Looking idly down he muttered to himself : “ It *can't* be an Antelope ! And yet . . . those horns . . . ” Suddenly Bushbuck took a step forward and peered intently at the sleeping figure. A very odd thing was happening. The horns were slipping sideways. Yes, there was no doubt about it—they were not growing as an Antelope's horns should grow. They were not growing at all. They had been stuck on with bees-wax and the wax was melting in the heat from the sun !

“ Come here, Sable,” called Bushbuck urgently. “ Come and look at this ! ”

“ What's the trouble ? ” Mpalapala demanded, as he came hurrying up.

“ Look,” said Bushbuck simply.

Mpalapala looked, and it was at that moment that the horns fell off altogether.

“ Suffering centipedes ! ” he exclaimed. “ If it isn't Kalulu,







## THE ANTELOPE'S PARTY

the Rabbit ! What impudence ! But fancy us not recognising him before ! ” And Sable began to laugh.

“ It is rather funny,” agreed Bushbuck with a grin. “ What shall we do to him ? We must pay him out somehow ! ”

“ Yes, yes,” cried all the other Antelopes, who by this time had gathered round.

“ Let’s throw him into the stream,” suggested Reedbuck. “ That ought to wake him up ! ”

“ Yes, let’s,” chorused the Antelopes. Quickly they picked the Rabbit up, carried him down to the water, and dropped him into a shallow pool.

“ Here ! Hi ! Help ! ” spluttered Kalulu. “ You are drowning me ! You know I can’t swim.”

“ If you were an Antelope you could ! ” jeered Reedbuck. “ So, of course, you can’t be an Antelope ! Besides, we thought you’d like to wash all that wax off your head,” he added, and all the Antelopes burst out laughing.

Now Kalulu, the Rabbit, hated being laughed at, and he hated the cold water *and* the Antelopes and their Party, and he longed to be back in his own nice, dry, comfortable home. So he made, a tremendous effort and somehow managed to struggle out of the stream on to the farther side. Then, without waiting to shake the water out of his coat, he bolted like a streak of lightning up the slope and away from all the laughter and the jeers. And not until quite late that afternoon did his usual self-confidence begin to return.

It was as the sun was setting that the Tortoises looked in to enquire how Kalulu had fared on the previous day.

“ What about last night ? ” asked Kamba, after they had congratulated each other on escaping safely from the fire.

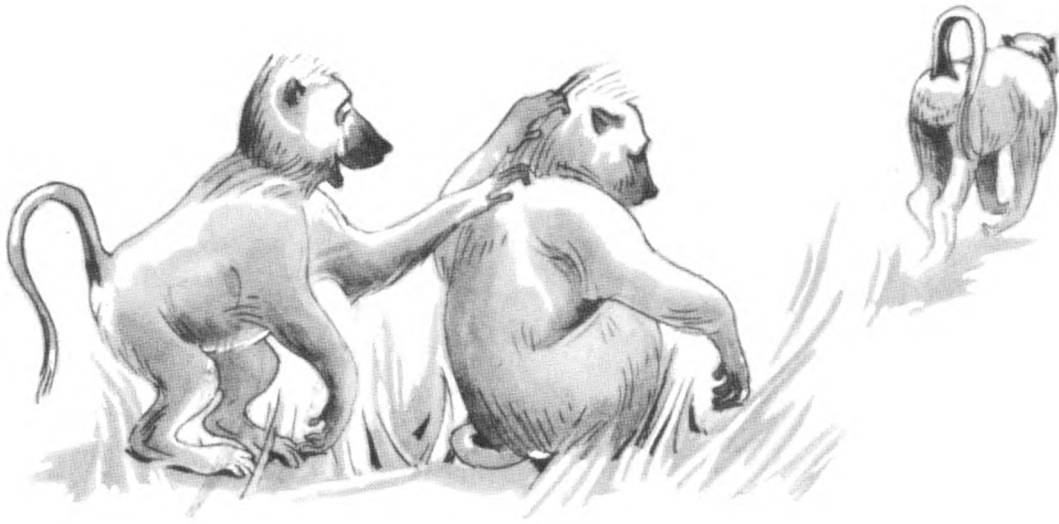
The Rabbit hesitated. Then : “ Oh, I went to Antelope’s Party,” he said carelessly. “ A very good show ! ”

“ Yes, so we heard,” said Mrs. Kamba sweetly. “ Bushbuck told us you were a great success. He said you made them laugh like anything ! ”

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

“ Bushbuck ? ” Kalulu looked quickly at Mrs. Kamba’s face. Just what had Bushbuck said to the Tortoises, he wondered ? How much did they know ?

But Mrs. Kamba’s face told him nothing. It wore the most innocent expression. Too innocent, Bushbuck might have thought . . .



## THE BABOONS

FOR a whole week there had only been one topic of conversation at the drinking pool, and that was the Baboons. They had appeared one day from goodness-alone-knew-where, a whole colony of them, and had made their "bwalo" amongst the trees and rocks of the hill above the river. There they lived, spending their days in idleness, quarrelling amongst themselves, shrieking, chattering, and stealing anything on which they could lay their hands. They were a constant nuisance and worry, especially to all the smaller animals, but no one knew how to get rid of them.

"I found them in my garden, yesterday," said Kalulu, the Rabbit. "They were stealing my maize."

"They would be," remarked Kamba, the Tortoise, in profound

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

disgust. "They'd steal their grandmothers' tails ! What did you do when you saw them ?"

"I threw a stick at them and told them to go away."

"And did they ?"

"Not at first. They merely laughed and then they mimicked me and threw the stick back ; so I chased them with it, and that made them run off."

"I'm glad to hear it ! Really, their behaviour is outrageous ! It is the way they imitate one that makes me so angry. And if they steal much more, there will soon be nothing left in our gardens. We must get rid of them somehow !"

"Mkango, the Lion, could frighten them away," suggested Duiker, who was, himself, extremely frightened of Lion.

"Yes, you are right," agreed Kalulu. "Mkango could, but would he do it ? He hasn't got a garden and the Baboons don't bother him. Still, there can be no harm in asking and I will go at once to Lion's cave."

Now Mkango, the Lion, had an only child—a sickly little cub—of whom he was as proud as proud could be. But he did not know how to look after it and, when Rabbit came to see him about the Baboons, it suddenly occurred to Lion that Kalulu was the very person for the job.

"Mkango," began Rabbit, bowing low, "I have come . . ."

"Just the person I wanted to see !" said Lion, effusively. "You will, I know, be only too pleased to take care of my child and be the first to appreciate the honour I am conferring on you . . ."

"Thank you." Kalulu bowed again. "But I've really come to ask . . ."

"You see," continued Mkango, taking no notice at all of what Kalulu was trying to say, "I can't look after the young cub myself—I can't leave him when I want to go hunting—so I must have someone else to care for the little fellow . . ."

"I've really come about the Baboons." Kalulu made a third attempt but still Mkango paid no attention.

"And you are the very person," he went on, patting Rabbit

## THE BABOONS

on the shoulder. "I can think of no one more suitable. You can take the child away with you now and, from time to time, I will look in to see how he is getting on."

"I don't think," began Kalulu. "I really came," Kalulu went on. "It was about . . ."

"Yes, yes," said Mkango, "I'm most grateful. My dear fellow, I really am most obliged. It was very good of you to call and so convenient as it is essential that I go hunting to-night—in fact, I ought to be starting at once, so I will bid you good evening. Take great care of the youngster, for I shall hold you responsible for anything that may happen." And, before Kalulu could say another word, Mkango, the Lion, had bounded out of the cave and gone in search of dinner.

"Well," said Kalulu, the Rabbit, to himself. "What do I do now? Have I really got to look after this tiresome child?"

As if in answer, the cub growled and Kalulu eyed it with distaste. It was a wretched little thing, scraggy, peevish, and obviously not in the best of health. Kalulu disliked the idea of having to care for it intensely but, if Mkango wished him to do so, there was no alternative. No one ever argued with Mkango—he was much too strong and powerful!

With extreme reluctance Rabbit took the cub back to his home and did what he could to make it comfortable but, in spite of his efforts, the little creature was restless and growled all through the night. Next day it refused to touch any food, and when, in the evening, it suddenly threw a fit, Kalulu realised that the cub was dangerously ill and he became quite distracted with worry. Desperately he wished that one of his friends might chance to call, so that he could send a message to Mkango, but no one came and he, himself, did not dare to leave the child, even for a moment. All night long he stayed beside it, giving it water, doing everything he could, but to no purpose. Nothing could save the little Lion's life.

Mkango was dozing in his cave when Kalulu came to break the tragic news.

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

"Who's there?" he called out, as Rabbit gave a polite cough.

"It is I, Kalulu, the Rabbit."

"What do you want? Where is my child? Have you dared to leave him alone?"

"Alas, your child is no more," replied Kalulu sadly. "I have done all that I could do."

"What?" roared Mkango. "My child is no more? I do not believe you. If that is true, then you must have killed him!"

"Indeed no!" exclaimed Kalulu. "The child was ill. I nursed him with the greatest care."

"I do not believe you."

"But it is true, I tell you."

"If he was ill, the fault was yours," said Mkango. "You must have been the cause. It is you who have killed my child, so now I will kill you."

"No!" Kalulu's voice rose shrilly. "No! I didn't do it. You can't blame me—I took the greatest care. I didn't kill your child. I can prove it, I can prove it!"

"How?" asked Mkango, the Lion.

"I . . ." began Kalulu, then he paused. A look of horror spread slowly over his face as he realised that he could bring no evidence whatever to support his story.. He had seen no one since he had taken the cub to his home; not one single animal could testify in his favour. A feeling of hopelessness came over him.

"You must give me time," he said huskily, putting a bewildered paw to his head. "I must have time."

Mkango considered for a moment, then:

"It shall not be held that I am unjust," he said. "You ask for time; I will give you three days. If you cannot prove your innocence within that period, I shall know that you are guilty and you shall die. Go, now, and find your proof."

Kalulu went. He went, almost without thinking, towards his garden. Vaguely he had an idea that there, in the shade of the



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tall mahogany tree, he would be able to scheme more easily ; that there, where the river flowed so calmly on its way, he would find peace and comfort.

He had forgotten the Baboons !

It was the shrill barking of their sentry that drew Kalulu's attention to their presence and, as he looked up, the whole hillside seemed to come alive with scurrying grey forms. There were scores of them ; old Baboons, young Baboons, big Baboons, little Baboons, mothers carrying their babies, babies scampering after their mothers, and nearly all of them held maize cobs in their hands. Kalulu stared at them for a moment before he realised, with a sudden rush of anger, that they had again been stealing from his garden.

" You wicked thieves ! You robbers ! " he yelled, shaking his fist. " Get out of my garden ! Go away ! "

The nearest Baboons laughed and shook their fists, too. " Thieves ! Robbers ! " they shouted, imitating Kalulu, " Get out of my garden ! Go away ! "

" Oh, GO AWAY ! " yelled the exasperated Rabbit, and he picked up a stone and threw it at the largest Baboon. " Go away, and leave me in peace ! "

Again the Baboons laughed. " Go away ! " they shouted, and the large Baboon picked up the stone, just as Kalulu had done, and threw it back at him.

It was intolerable, Kalulu felt, the way they copied his every movement. It was intolerable that they would not go away. For that matter, it was intolerable that they should ever have come to the neighbourhood. If it hadn't been for them, Kalulu reflected, he would never have gone to see Mkango. And, if he hadn't gone to see Mkango, he would not have had to look after his child and would not now be accused of killing it. It was, in fact, all the Baboons fault—yes, entirely their fault !

As he brooded on this point, something seemed to click in Rabbit's brain and, in a sudden flash of inspiration, Kalulu saw a possible way out of all his difficulties. Supposing he could

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make Mkango think that the Baboons were guilty—and, argued Kalulu, if anyone was to blame it was they—then his own innocence would be established and, at the same time, he would be rid of the Baboons, for Mkango would certainly drive them out of the country once he was persuaded that they had killed his child. How, then, could he be persuaded?

It was no good trying to think in the garden although the Baboons, having stolen as much maize as they could carry, were now beginning to move off. No, thought Kalulu, he would go back to his home and perhaps play with the new top that he had made, because spinning a top often helped ideas to come into his head.

Without troubling any more about the Baboons, Rabbit ran back to his home and, when he had found his top and the little whip that he had also made, he went to the nearest clearing and began to spin it. And, all the time the top was spinning, he talked aloud to himself.

“How can I make Mkango think that it is the Baboons who have killed his child? Lion thinks that it is I. Lion thinks that I have killed his child, that I have killed his child, that I have killed his child . . .”

“Crack” went the whip; “Whirr” went the top, and away it went spinning. Never had it spun so well before—there seemed to be something in the rhythm of Kalulu’s words that made it go. Again and again he repeated the same phrase and, of course, he really said it in his own language:

“Ine ndinapa mwana wa Mkango,  
(It is I who killed the Lion’s child)  
Ine ndinapa mwana wa Mkango.”

It was fascinating! So fascinating that, for a time, Kalulu forgot his troubles and it was only when an excited chattering broke out all round him that he realised that the Baboons had followed him home and were watching his movements with the keenest interest.

Kalulu gazed at them in exasperation. The unspeakable

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creatures were all pretending to whip tops, just as Rabbit had been doing, and they were all talking, exactly as he had done.

“ Ine ndinapa mwana wa Mkango,  
(It is I who killed the Lion's child)  
Ine ndinapa mwana wa Mkango.”

Kalulu watched them, angrily at first, then thoughtfully and with quickening interest, until suddenly he threw back his head and laughed and laughed and laughed. The Baboons at once stopped spinning their imaginary tops and looked at him in surprise.

“ Why don't you make tops for yourselves ? ” Kalulu asked.  
“ You would enjoy spinning real ones. It makes a very pleasant game.”

“ It seems a pleasant game,” agreed the Baboons.

“ Would one of you like to play with my top ? ” said Kalulu.

“ Yes, indeed,” answered the largest Baboon, looking more surprised than ever. “ Will you show me what to do ? ”

“ Certainly,” said Rabbit. “ It is quite easy. You take the whip . . . so, then you place the top . . . so, and as you say ‘ ine,’ you crack the whip and away the top goes. The important thing is to keep saying ‘ ine ndinapa mwana wa Mkango ’ all the time.”

“ Oh, I can do that ! ” said the Baboon. “ Just you watch me ! ” and he did as Rabbit had told him and when, at the word “ ine,” the top began to spin, he was absolutely entranced. “ Ho ! ho ! ho ! ” he laughed, and “ Ho ! ho ! ho ! ” laughed all the other Baboons. “ What a splendid game this is ! ”

“ Let me have a try, now,” said one, stepping forward.

“ Then me ! ” shouted another.

“ And me ! ” “ And me ! ” “ And me ! ” cried a third and a fourth and a fifth, until the whole circle were begging for a turn.

“ Of course,” agreed Rabbit, “ you must all learn to play and I will teach you how to make your own tops. Then you can practise to-morrow and, on the third day, we will have a competition and I will give a prize—a large bag of beans—to the one who is best at spinning.”

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

"Ho ! ho ! ho !" laughed the Baboons again. "A competition ? A prize ? A large bag of beans ? How delightful that will be !" and they chattered and laughed more than ever while Kalulu showed them, one by one, exactly what they had to do.

All next day the Baboons played with their newly-made tops and, in the evening, Kalulu went to Mkango's cave.

"Well ?" growled Lion, when he saw him. "Why are you here ? I gave you until to-morrow to prove your innocence."

Kalulu bowed. "To-morrow I will prove it."

"Why, then, have you come to-day ?"

"To tell you that it is the Baboons who have killed your child."

"The Baboons ? I do not believe it ! Why should they kill my child ?"

"Who can say ?" answered Kalulu. "But the Baboons are thieves and robbers ; there is no crime they would not commit, and I have heard them boasting, as they spin their tops, that it is they who killed your cub."

"Boasting as they spin their tops ?" roared Mkango, his mane bristling with rage. "If that is so, I will drive them out of the country. I will harry them until not one Baboon remains. They shall know what it means to incur my wrath ! But how can I tell that what you say is true ? Why should I believe it ? It is just a story that you have made up to save yourself, Kalulu. Of course it is not true and it is you who are guilty."

"Will you come with me to-morrow and watch the Baboons as they play ?" asked Rabbit.

"Where do these creatures live ?"

"On the hill above the river, and they spin their tops in the big clearing near my home."

"If they play in the clearing, how shall I be able to hear what they say ? I shall not be close enough, for they will run away the moment they see me."

"I have thought of that," answered Kalulu. "If you will





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leave it to me, I can promise that you shall be right in their midst without arousing the least suspicion."

"Very well," said Mkango, after a moment's thought. "I will do as you wish, but if I find there is any trickery, it will be the worse for you."

In the middle of the clearing lay a fallen tree-trunk and on this Kalulu sat and waited for the Baboons to come. Beside him was a sack—a large sack—for it was the day of the competition, and was not a bag of beans to be the prize ?

Kalulu did not have long to wait. Only a few seconds passed before the Baboons, shrieking and chattering as usual, began to arrive in scores. All except the smallest ones carried tops and, as they gambolled along, they cracked their whips and muttered the magic words that made them spin so well.

"Ine ndinapa mwana wa Mkango,  
Ine ndinapa mwana wa Mkango."

Once they reached the clearing, they did not wait for any signal from Kalulu—oh, no ! they were in far too great a hurry to show how skilful they had become ! Before they had been there a minute their tops were humming away and dozens of voices were chanting merrily :

"Ine ndinapa mwana wa Mkango "  
(It is I who killed the Lion's child)  
"Ine ndinapa mwana wa Mkango."  
(Crack . . . whirr . . . . . )  
(Crack . . . whirr . . . . . )  
"Ine ndinapa mwana wa Mkango."

The Baboons did not watch each other, they did not even look at Kalulu for approval, they had eyes for nothing but their own tops. Not one of them so much as glanced at the bag of beans, so no one saw it give an excited quiver or heard it make a growling noise, just as if it were saying : "Let me out of here, so that I can get at these Baboons. I'll teach them to boast ! I'll teach them how to use a whip ! Let me out at once, I say !"

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Not one single Baboon saw Rabbit lean down to the sack and untie the string with which it was fastened. Utterly unconscious of their danger, the Baboons played happily on until, with a shattering roar, Mkango sprang out. A fearful shriek went up as he bounded towards them. Dropping their tops and their whips, the panic-stricken Baboons raced helter-skelter up the hill. They reached their "bwalo" and shouted to the few Baboons on guard to run for their lives. "Lion is after us !" they cried. "Mkango is close behind us. Run ! Run, if you wish to live !" and on they went themselves, moving faster than they had ever done before. Behind them came Mkango, roaring terribly and breathing such threats that the whole hillside seemed to shake and tremble.

On they went and on, and still Mkango followed after them. Other animals saw the chase go by and ran delightedly to tell each other that the Baboons were being driven out.

"Kalulu has done it," they said. "Kalulu has saved us and our gardens ! Let us go at once to thank him !"

They found him in the now deserted clearing, playing happily with his top.

"Kalulu ! Kalulu ! The Baboons have gone. Lion is driving them away. You are clever, Kalulu ! Tell us how you managed it ?"

"Just by spinning my top," answered Rabbit carelessly.

"Don't be absurd," laughed they. "What nonsense you do talk ! Anyway, however you managed it, we are very glad."

For a moment Kalulu was silent. Thoughtfully he gazed at the setting sun which he might so easily never have seen again. Then, with a queer little smile, he spoke :

"You can't possibly be as glad as I am," he said simply.





## THE NUMBER OF SPOTS

NYALUGWE, the Leopard, gazed at his reflection in the Looking-Pool above the waterfall and told himself for the hundredth time that his coat was truly magnificent. Those spots . . . yes, they really were superb !

Suddenly the stillness of the pool was broken as an ugly, flat head appeared above the surface. In alarm, Nyalugwe jumped back. He had not expected to find Crocodile there—not that N'gona was likely to take liberties with *him*, but, well, you never could tell with Crocodiles.

“Ha !” barked N'gona nastily. “Gazing at yourself as usual, I see. Vain creature !”

“You'd be vain if you'd been given the lovely spots that I have,” replied Nyalugwe with dignity.

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"Spots—pah ! Who wants spots ? What's the good of spots I'd like to know."

"You'd soon find out if you lived in the woods instead of in the river."

"The river's a very good place, thank you—or it would be if you didn't come here so often to gaze at your silly self." Crocodile snorted. "I wonder you don't count your precious spots ! Or perhaps you have ? How many of the pretty things are there ?" he enquired with a sneer.

"I don't know. I never thought of counting," said Leopard as he turned the idea over in his mind and found it good. "Now that you have suggested it, I should very much like to know. But I don't see how I can count them for myself." Nyalugwe wasn't going to admit that he did not know how to count, and he wondered if, by any chance, Crocodile knew.

"Would you like to count them for me ?" he asked.

"No, I would not !" barked N'goni. "I've something better to do than to waste my time counting spots." And with a vicious swirl of his tail, Crocodile turned and slipped beneath the surface of the water.

"I bet that means N'goni can't count," chuckled Nyalugwe as he stalked up the river bank and wandered into the woods, where he happened to meet Njiri, the Wart-hog.

"Morning, Njiri !" he called out. "I suppose you wouldn't care to count my spots for me, would you ?"

"What, me ? Count ? One-two-three-four ?"

"Yes, that's it," cried Leopard excitedly. "What luck that you know how !"

"But I don't," said the surprised Wart-hog. "Whatever made you think that ?"

"Oh, you do ! You must ! . . . what you said—'one-two-something-something.' That's counting."

Wart-hog shook his head.

"It's much more difficult than that," he said earnestly.

## THE NUMBER OF SPOTS

"There are things that come after 'four,' and I don't know what they are, or what they mean."

"A pity," sighed Nyalugwe, looking very disappointed. "I wonder who would know?"

"Ask at the Drinking-pool to-night," suggested Njiri. "There's sure to be someone there who could help you."

"That's an idea." Nyalugwe brightened up at once. "I know! I'll give a prize to anyone who can tell me how many spots I've got."

There was quite a large gathering at the Drinking-pool that night, and when the animals heard that Nyalugwe was offering a bag of maize as a prize, they were only too eager to start counting. Njobvu, the Elephant, insisted that he should have first try, as he was the oldest and biggest animal present.

"One-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight-nine-ten," he started, all in one breath and at a tremendous pace. Then he took another breath. "One-two-three-four-five-si . . ."

"No, no!" shrieked the other animals. "You've already got as far as ten."

Elephant frowned.

"I should be obliged if you would refrain from interrupting," he said coldly. "You have made me forget where I was . . . somewhere in the second ten, I think?"

"What d'you mean, 'the second ten'?" demanded Nchefu, the Eland.

"The numbers that come after the first ten, of course. I don't approve of those 'teen'-things and I prefer to count ten twice, which makes twenty. It's all a Question-of-Multiplication." Njobvu's air of superiority was quite insufferable, and although none of the animals knew what Elephant meant by this last remark, they were determined not to be impressed.

"Supposing you start again at the beginning," suggested Njati, the Buffalo.

So Elephant began again, and when he'd counted ten twice and made it twenty he stood quite still and thought so hard

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

that his whole face puckered up into little wrinkles. Then, slowly, he made his announcement.

"Nyalugwe has *more* than twenty spots."

"How many more?" asked Leopard.

Again Njobvu frowned.

"A good many more, I should say"—his manner was exceedingly casual. "In fact, there are so many that I haven't time to count them for you, and really I must be going." With a condescending nod he began to walk away, looking exactly as if he had an important appointment to keep, though of course he hadn't, and there was no need whatever for him to go.

"Tee-hee!" giggled a young Bushbuck. "I don't believe Elephant can count above twenty for all the airs he gives himself!" (And Bushbuck was quite right.)

"Can *you* count above twenty?" asked Leopard, but not very hopefully.

"Me? Oh, no! I can only count four. I can do that because I know I've got four legs."

Nyalugwe sighed. He was beginning to feel depressed.

"Can't *anyone* count better than Elephant?" he asked sadly.

"I once counted up to fifty," said Nkaka, the Ant-bear, diffidently. "Do you think that would be enough?"

"It might. Come and try."

"Very well. Where shall I start? At the tail, I think . . . one, two, three, four, five . . . now I wonder if that ought to count as one or two spots? It's sort of double."

All the animals crowded round and looked at the spot in question. After a good deal of arguing, it was agreed that it should only count as one.

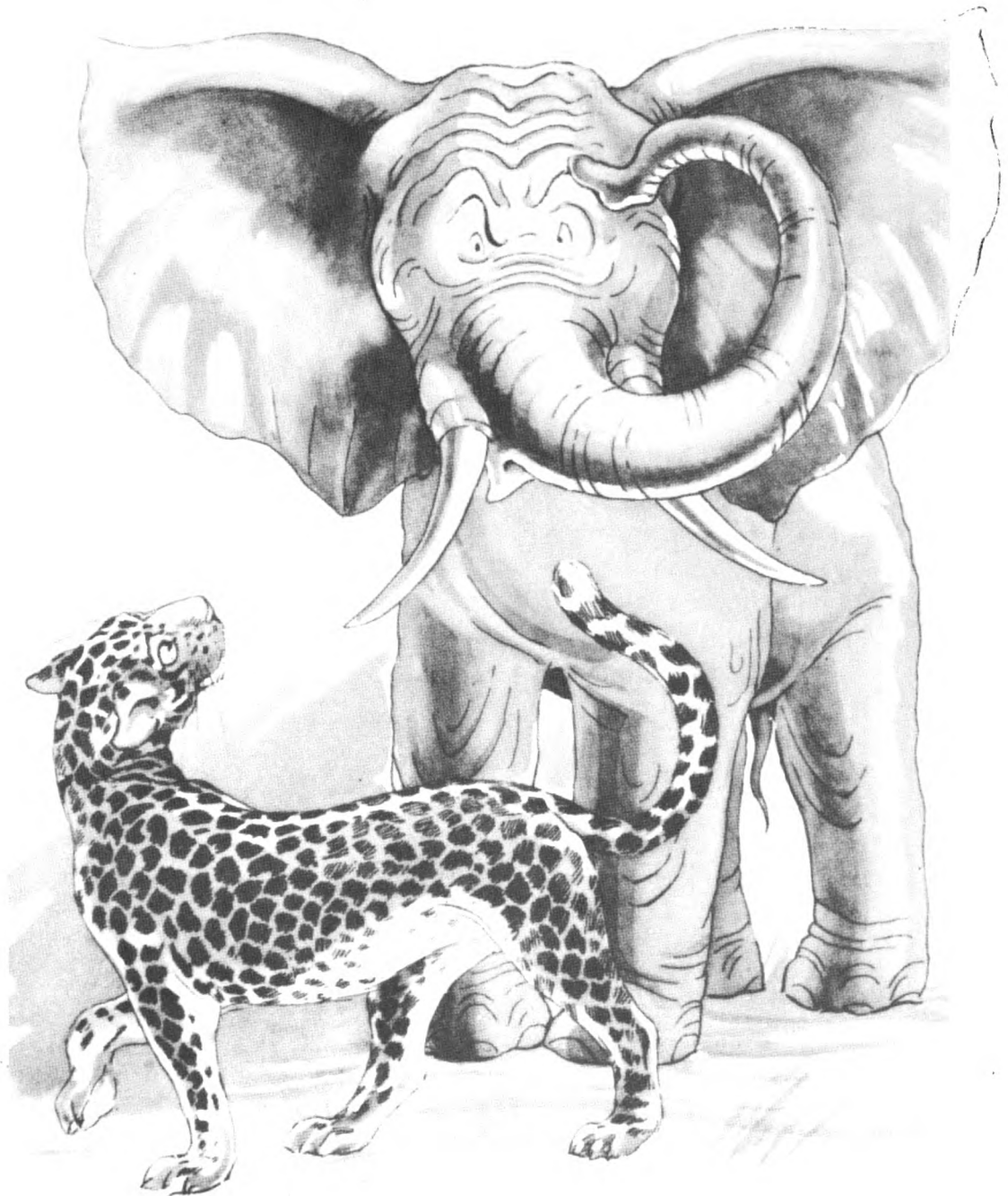
"What does that make, then?" asked Nkaka.

"Six," said Jackal.

"Five—Nkaka said"—this from Eland.

"Better start again," said Njati, the Buffalo, in a mournful voice.

Nkaka took his advice and got as far as eleven without any trouble.





## THE NUMBER OF SPOTS

" . . . twelve . . . that's a very fine spot, that is ! . . . twelve . . . "

" You've said ' twelve ' once," muttered Eland.

" 'Sh ! Don't interrupt ! " .

" Oh, dear, you've put me off," complained Nkaka. " Did I count that spot or did I not ? "

" Better start again," said Njati gloomily.

Nkaka sighed and did so. This time, with some difficulty, she got as far as twenty-nine. Then she paused and thought hard for a long time.

" It's no good," she said at last. " I've forgotten what comes after twenty-nine." .

" Doesn't ' thirty ' ? " said Kamba, the Tortoise. " Or is it ' forty ' ? "

" Thirty ! That's right ! " exclaimed Nkaka joyfully. " Thirty . . . now, where was I ? "

" Half way up the tail."

" Yes, but was that the twenty-ninth . . . or that ? " She indicated two spots and a great deal of arguing followed.

" You'll have to start again." Njati, the Buffalo, was almost beginning to enjoy himself.

" Start what again ? " It was Kalulu, the Rabbit, who spoke. He had only that moment arrived and knew nothing of what was going on.

Instantly all the Animals began to talk at once and explain about Leopard's spots.

" Wants to know how many he's got, does he ? " said Kalulu when he had, at last, managed to grasp what they were trying to say. " Well, that oughtn't to be difficult. I can tell him."

" You can ? "

" Yes. It's easy. Look ? " Kalulu pointed to the first spot. " This one is dark, isn't it ? Now, *this* one is light. Here . . . dark . . . here . . . light . . . dark . . . light . . . dark . . . " He went on until every spot had been touched.

" You see ? " he said when he had finished. " Leopard has only got two spots—dark ones and light ones."







## THE TRAP

NJIRI, the Wart-hog, opened one eye and glanced sleepily at the sun.

"Time to get up," he muttered with a yawn. "Not that there is anything to get up for . . . or is there?" He frowned thoughtfully as he rose and stretched himself, but his brain, which at the best of times was only a very small brain, was no good at all in the early morning ; so he didn't try to think very hard and before long began to lick his trotters instead. When

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he was satisfied that they were clean he rubbed his back against the nearest tree, because he enjoyed the nice scratchy feeling and often found it helpful if he wanted to remember anything he might have forgotten.

Of course Njiri didn't *know* if he'd forgotten anything or not, but this morning he had a sort of an idea that there might be something . . . Suddenly he remembered—and his snout fairly twitched with excitement ! The Trap ! Yes, that was it ! Hadn't Kalulu, the Rabbit, shown him how to set a game-trap the previous afternoon ? And hadn't it been set as cunningly as any trap that had ever been laid ? Well then ! Surely it had caught something . . . and if so, then what ? That was the question—What ?

Nothing ? Oh, no, it was a much too trappy trap for that. But in any case the obvious thing was to go and see at once, and Wart-hog always did the Obvious Thing. He did it now, and as he ran along the path through the wood he wondered what he was going to find.

“Something wonderful,” whispered the grasses.

“Something exciting,” whispered the trees.

“Nothing at all,” muttered the Cactus, but Wart-hog paid no attention, for he was sure the Cactus was wrong.

He was getting near now. Soon he would know. A little thrill squiggled all the way down his spine . . . He could hear sounds ahead—coming from the trap ? . . . Yes, they were just the sounds you'd expect to hear if you'd caught something ! Breathlessly Njiri pushed on until the trap was in sight.

One look was enough. Most certainly he had caught something—something so terrifying that Wart-hog stopped dead and every bristle stood on end.

Struggling with the poles that held him captive stood Mkango, the Lion, and he was very angry.

“Hey !” called out Lion as soon as he saw Njiri. “Come and get me out of this.” But Njiri stood quite still and made no answer, for he was almost paralysed with fright.





## THE TRAP

"Come on ! " Lion called again. "Come and help."  
Wart-hog shook his head.

"Don't stand there shaking your stupid head," roared Mkango. "Come and let me out."

Still Njiri neither moved nor spoke.

"Do you mean to say . . . ? " began Lion furiously. Then he changed his tone. "Surely you don't think I'd hurt you if you were to let me out ? " he asked. "Why, I wouldn't do that for the world. You are quite safe with me—I'm your friend, I am, and you can't refuse to help a friend, Njiri. Besides, if only you'll let me out I'll give you such a handsome present."

"Who ? Me ? A present ? " Wart-hog found his tongue at last.

"So long as you help me I'll give you anything you like."

"And be my Friend ? "

"Haven't I said so ? "

Njiri nodded his head slowly. His mind was made up. It was wonderful to think of being Mkango's Friend—Mkango who was one of the Most Important Animals in all Africa ; wonderful to know that Lion had promised to give him anything he cared to ask. Certainly he would let him out ! Without wasting any more time, Wart-hog opened the door of the trap and Lion jumped out and bounded round and round him just to show how pleased he was.

"Thank you, thank you, Njiri," said Mkango. "You've no idea how good it feels to be free again ! Now, you must come along with me and have some breakfast and then we'll see about that present."

"That would be nice," said Wart-hog as they moved off, side by side, along the path that led to Lion's Cave. It was quite a wide path, but after a bit it began to grow narrower and Mkango politely told Njiri to walk in front. Njiri did, and as he walked along he wondered to himself what sort of a present Mkango would give him and whether there was anything special he wanted to ask for. And as Mkango walked along behind, *he*

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

thought to himself : " What a silly creature Wart-hog is," and then he thought : " but he has a very fine tail . . . which would taste very good . . . especially if you were *very* hungry ! "

And very soon after that Lion suddenly said :

" Njiri ! I can't walk any further unless I have something to eat. You must give me your tail."

" My tail ? Oh, no, I can't do that." Wart-hog was very much alarmed.

" Yes, you can," Lion insisted. " You don't really want a tail and it won't hurt a bit if I bite it off. I must have it—I'm so hungry and you can't let a friend starve just because you don't want to part with your tail. A real friend wouldn't hesitate to give it up."

" Wouldn't he ? " Wart-hog looked very unhappy. He didn't in the least want to part with his tail and he found it exceedingly hard to believe that he ought to give it away.

" I'm sure you can't be right," he said at last. " I'm going to ask someone else. I'll ask Kalulu, the Rabbit, because he lives close by and he is certain to know."

Mkango didn't think this at all a good idea, but Njiri refused to argue and ran as fast as he could to Rabbit's home, and Lion ran after him so that they were both a little out of breath by the time they reached it.

" Well, well, whatever is all this ? " asked Kalulu.

" Listen," panted Wart-hog. " I found Lion in the trap . . . he promised to be my friend . . . so I let him out. Now he says I must give him my tail . . . because he is hungry. He says a Real Friend wouldn't Hesitate. What do you think ? "

Kalulu blinked. Ignoring Wart-hog's question, he turned to Mkango.

" You were caught in a trap ? " he asked. " I don't understand that."

" It was a very clever trap," said Mkango, by way of excuse.

" Nonsense ! No one with any intelligence gets caught. I can't believe that you were. How did it happen ? "

## THE TRAP

"Well," began Mkango, "it was like this. The trap was here"—he indicated a stone—"and I was walking along here . . ."

"But there isn't a trap here," said Kalulu. "If there was I'd have seen it."

"No, no ! Not *here*. Some distance away, in the big wood."

"Then why did you say you were walking along here ?" demanded Rabbit.

"I didn't."

"Yes, you did."

"I meant I was walking *there*, near where the trap was."

"Well I think its all very confusing," said Rabbit. "And I shall never understand how you got caught if you can't explain better than this. It must have been through sheer foolishness."

"It wasn't !" Mkango was getting peevish. "If you don't believe me I'll show you the trap."

"Very well. Let's go and see it at once."

Together Lion and Wart-hog and Rabbit walked back to the trap and when they reached it Kalulu inspected it carefully. Then :

"And you mean to say you walked into that ?" he asked Mkango.

"Yes."

"Weren't you looking where you were going ?"

"Certainly I was. I was looking at the piece of meat and I never saw . . ."

"Where was the meat ?"

"Here," said Mkango, walking in and pointing to a spot at the far end of the trap.

"And when you were inside, I suppose the door fell down and shut you in like this ?" asked Kalulu as he carefully closed the door.

"Yes, that's right," agreed Lion.

"Well, well, well !" said Kalulu with a sigh of relief. "Now

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

I understand. But fancy being caught *twice* in one day ! Some people have no intelligence at all."

Mkango started.

"Twice ? " he said in a hoarse voice. " What do you mean ? "

Kalulu grinned.

" I mean," he said sweetly, " that now you are safely in the trap once more, there is no need for Njiri to give you his tail."





## THE SWALLOW AND THE MOLE

Mfuko, the Mole, twitched a sensitive ear, cocked his head on one side and listened intently. Undoubtedly something had fallen on the ground above him—something that seemed to be making pitiful little moaning noises.

“Better go and see what it is,” said Mfuko to himself. “May be someone in need of help.”

He tunnelled rapidly to the surface and thrust a cautious head through the soft earth. At first he could see nothing, for the bright sunlight made him blink, and his eyesight was never good. But his keen hearing directed him to the moaning sounds and by the time he reached the place they came from he could just make out the form of a small bird lying, apparently exhausted, on the ground.

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“ My poor fellow,” exclaimed Mole in great concern. “ What has happened ? Is anything broken ? ”

“ I don’t know,” replied the bird, speaking with difficulty. “ I fell . . . so tired . . . been flying for days . . . O-oh ! ” he sighed, and closed his weary eyes.

“ There, there ! ” said Mole. “ Don’t you talk any more. Just rest quietly here while I go and fetch some food and water for you. I expect that’s what you need ! ” And Mfuko bustled off to his own store as fast as he could. Luckily his water-pot was full, so there was no difficulty about that, but food ? . . . the only food he had was Worm, and surely all birds ate “ Worm ” ? If not he’d have to find something else ! Mole hurried back.

“ Now,” he said, “ a drink of water’ll do you good. And then, what about a nice fat Worm ? ”

The bird’s eyes opened and he nodded feebly, but made no attempt to move, so Mole splashed a little water over him. This helped to revive him, and, with an effort, the bird struggled to his feet and started to drink. He drank and he drank and he drank, and when at last he had had enough he turned to the Mole.

“ *Did* you say ‘ Worm ’ ? ” he asked.

Mfuko nodded and produced what had been the finest Worm in the larder.

“ How kind,” murmured the bird and gobbled it up. “ I suppose you haven’t any more ? ”

“ Yes, certainly. Here you are. Help yourself and have as many as you like.”

“ Thank you, thank you,” said the bird gratefully and swallowed three in quick succession. “ Mm . . . delicious ! I feel quite different now. I really don’t know how I can ever repay you for your kindness.”

“ That’s all right,” said Mole hastily. “ Only too glad to have been of use.”

“ Hullo ! Hullo ! ” a voice called out suddenly. “ What’s happening here ? ”

## THE SWALLOW AND THE MOLE

Mole looked round to see who the newcomer might be.

"Why, it's my old friend Kamba!" he exclaimed delightedly. Then he turned to the bird and said: "You must meet my friend, the Tortoise. I'll introduce you. What, if I may ask, is your name?"

"Namazeze. I am Namazeze, the Swallow."

"And what has brought you to these parts?" asked Kamba when the introductions had been made.

"Chance," replied the Swallow, and began to tell them of his great flight. Spellbound they listened to the tale; from the far North he had come, he and all his friends and relations—but a great storm had arisen and somehow he had become separated from the others.

"Oh!" exclaimed Kamba suddenly, as Swallow was pausing for breath. "I'd quite forgotten the reason of my visit to-day! I came to tell you about the competition."

"What competition?" asked Mole.

"You know—the yearly one for the election of the Chief."

"What is it to be this time?"

"A sort of ball game. Njobvu, the Elephant, is to throw the ball high into the air and whoever catches it will be elected Chief."

"Hm!" said Mole. "And, of course, Elephant will be the one to catch the ball. It is easy for him with that long trunk of his! I don't want to be unkind," he continued, "but I do think it is rather . . . er . . . well . . . noticeable the way Elephant always chooses a competition that he is certain of winning, don't you?"

"Yes," agreed Kamba. "It certainly is very noticeable. Really, it hardly seems worth our while to compete, but I suppose we must—for the look of the thing. I do wish someone else *could* win this time!"

"When is the competition to take place?" asked the Swallow suddenly.

"In two days' time. Why?"

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

"Oh, I just wondered."

"I think I ought to be going now," said Kamba. "I'll see you at the competition, Mfuko, if not before. Will you be there, Namazeze?"

"Perhaps," answered the Swallow, thoughtfully. "It might be rather interesting."

On the morning of the competition Mfuko, the Mole, emerged from his home, looking very spruce, and carrying a large bag made of civet-skin. He was exceedingly proud of this bag, which had belonged to his great-grandfather, and he always took it with him whenever he went anywhere important.

Namazeze, the Swallow, was waiting for him, and together they walked towards the place where the competition was to be held. Just as they were getting near, Swallow suddenly stopped and said he felt dreadfully tired.

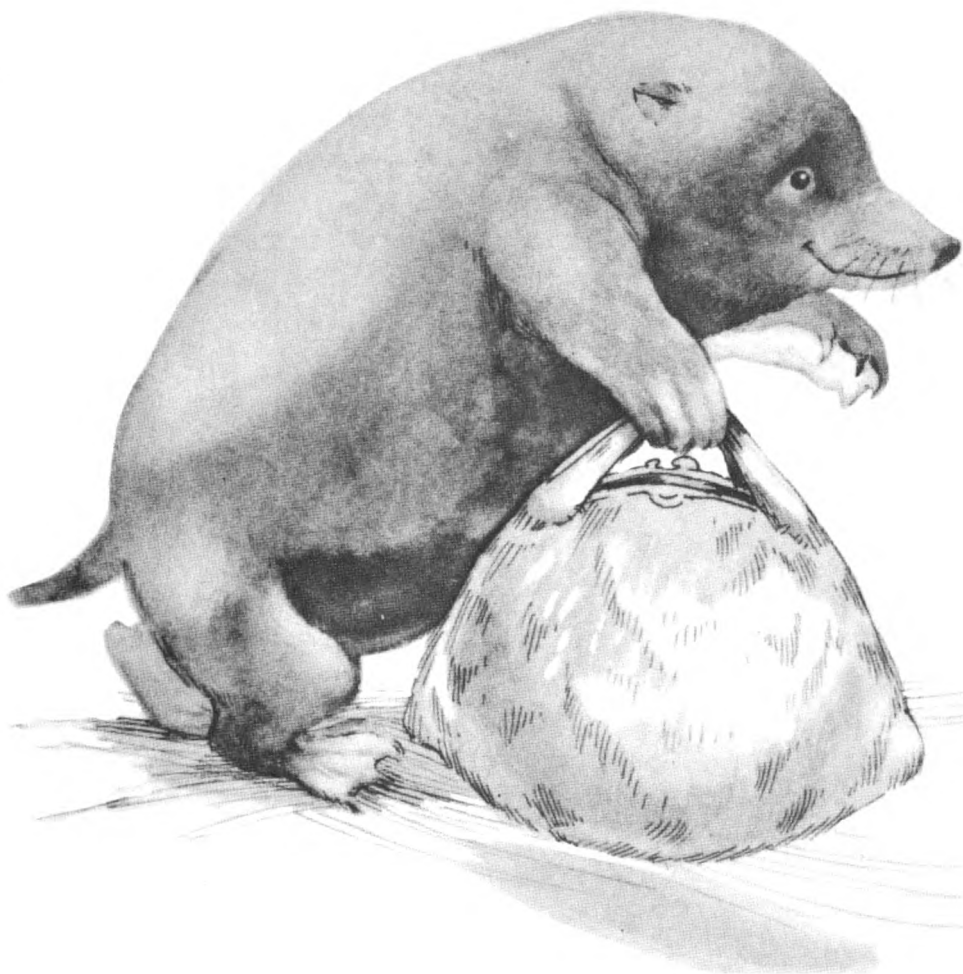
"I suppose you couldn't manage to carry me in that bag of yours?" he asked the Mole. "I don't weigh much, and I do so want to come with you."

"Of course," said Mole instantly. "In you get! You'll be quite comfortable and you'll find a Worm or two in there, if you should feel hungry."

"*How* kind you are," murmured Namazeze as he climbed in. "You'll leave the bag open a little so that I can breathe, won't you?" he added. "And don't say anything to anybody about my being here. I'd rather no one knew."

"Just as you like, my dear fellow," said Mole and, grasping the bag firmly, he hurried on.

All the animals for miles round had gathered in the wide, open space where the competition was about to take place. It was a hot day and very dusty, and by the time Mfuko arrived he was only too glad to put his bag on the ground and sit down beside it. He peered round for a while, but what with the glare and the dust and his own bad sight, he could not see any of his particular friends, though he could hear Njobvu, the Elephant,





## THE SWALLOW AND THE MOLE

explaining about the ball game to those who were crowding round him. Mole didn't think it worth while to pay much attention to what was being said—after all, what chance had a little creature like himself? Why, he'd never even see the ball, let alone catch it !

Suddenly Elephant trumpeted loudly.

"Do you all understand?" he shouted. "The person who catches this ball will be the new Chief. Now, are you ready? . . . Are you ready? . . . Go!" And he threw the ball (a green bush-orange) high into the air.

Up it went and up, and all the animals jostled and pushed and craned their necks to watch it, but they made so much dust that they could not see a thing. Certainly they could not see Namazeze, the Swallow, fly out of Mole's little bag, nor did they see him catch the ball in mid-air and come flying back again. And all that Mole himself saw was a large, green ball descending right into his paws.

"Where is the ball?" cried all the animals. "Has no one caught it?"

"Yes, I have," said Mole in a small, surprised voice.

"You? Mole? Impossible!" Everyone was amazed.

"Yes, here it is," said Mole, and ran forward with the ball.

For a moment there was silence. Then Njobvu spoke with scarcely-veiled annoyance.

"Well done, Mfuko," he said. "But, of course, the ball has to be caught *three* times."

"Oh!" Mole felt rather crushed and disappointed, and returned sadly to his bag. As he reached it he peeped inside to see if Namazeze was all right. Yes, there the Swallow was, apparently fast asleep. Mole sat down and waited for the ball to be thrown a second time.

"Are you all ready?" shouted Njobvu a moment later.

"Are you ready? Go!"

Up went the ball again, the Animals pushed and jostled, the dust grew thicker and thicker, and out flew the Swallow,

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

unnoticed by anyone, and when the Animals cried : “ Where is the ball ? Who has it ? ” Mole was as amazed as everyone else to find that it was clasped firmly in his own two paws.

“ Well ! ” he thought to himself. “ This really is most extraordinary ! ” and, shaking his head in a rather bewildered way, he ran and gave the ball back to the Elephant.

Njobvu scowled at him and said nothing, and Mfuko returned to his place by the bag. He was beginning to feel very excited and listened eagerly for the next “ Are you ready ? Go ! ”

For the third time the ball went up. Up . . . up . . . and up. Again the Animals pushed and jostled, again they raised a cloud of dust, again the Swallow flew unnoticed into the air. And for the third time Mfuko, the Mole, suddenly found the ball descending into his own paws. Tightly he clutched it, tightly he held it, and without waiting for the cry of : “ Who has the ball ? ” he shouted “ I’ve got it ! I’ve got it,” and he began to dance about with delight.

“ Well done ! ” yelled Kamba, the Tortoise. “ Now you are our Chief. Mfuko is our Chief ! ” The cry was taken up and echoed by everyone except Njobvu, the Elephant, who was disgusted at the way his plans had failed. But even he had to accept the fact that Mfuko *was* the new Chief, and all the other Animals were delighted, for they were sure that Mole would be much better than the Elephant.

On the way home Kamba, who was walking with the proud and happy Mole, enquired after the Swallow.

“ I didn’t see Namazeze this morning, did you ? ” he said.

“ No, you wouldn’t have seen him,” answered Mole. “ The poor fellow was so tired that he asked me to put him in my bag so that he could rest. He didn’t want me to tell anyone, but I’m sure he won’t mind your knowing.”

“ Is he there now ? ” Kamba asked.

Mole opened the bag a little wider and showed it to the Tortoise.



## THE SWALLOW AND THE MOLE

“Hullo,” said Namazeze sleepily, opening one eye. “Is the Competition over?”

“Yes,” said Kamba. “And who do you think is the new Chief?”

“Njobvu, the Elephant, I suppose?”

“No. Mole is! He caught the ball! *Three* times!! Isn't it wonderful! What a pity you were asleep.”

Namazeze looked at the Tortoise, and there was an odd expression on his face. Then: “Yes,” he said carelessly. “Wasn't it a pity!”





## KALULU'S PUMPKINS

"I'M going to grow pumpkins," announced Kalulu, the Rabbit, to his friends one evening. "It is quite easy. All you have to do is to hoe some mounds of earth and sow three seeds in each. Then, in a few months' time, you have a beautiful crop of pumpkins."

"Well, if it is as simple as that," said Njobvu, the Elephant, "I think I'll grow some, too. Pumpkins, if I remember rightly, are good to eat—very good."

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"Have you any seed?" asked Kalulu.

"No," answered Njobvu, "but you have, and I am sure you wouldn't be so niggardly as to keep it all to yourself. You'd give some to an old friend like me, wouldn't you?"

"Hmm!" Rabbit wrinkled his nose and considered the matter. He had not got very much seed and had not meant to give any away. On the other hand, Elephant would certainly make himself unpleasant if he didn't get what he wanted. Besides, it might be a good thing if Njobvu were to grow his own pumpkins—otherwise he would always be asking Rabbit to give him "just one" or helping himself from Rabbit's garden.

"Very well," said Kalulu at last, "I'll give you a little—I can't spare much. You can come and fetch it early to-morrow morning."

"Certainly," agreed Njobvu. "And you shall show me just what has to be done."

Next morning, Kalulu was up before the sun, clearing the grass and weeds from his garden and hoeing the red earth into deep, rich mounds. He worked hard and fast and had almost finished by the time that Elephant arrived.

"You're late, Njobvu," Rabbit called out. "The sun is getting hot. Have you brought your hoe?"

"No, I can't find it. I've been looking everywhere, but it has gone. It's lost, Kalulu. Someone has stolen poor Njobvu's hoe! But you will lend me yours, won't you?"

"I don't like lending my hoe."

"Oh, dear," sighed Njobvu. "Well, will you hoe my garden for me? You would do it so much better than I should."

This, of course, was perfectly true, but Kalulu was hot and he was tired and he didn't see why he should do everything for Elephant, so he refused.

"No," he said firmly, "I will not dig your garden. You can have the hoe, and the seeds, and I will show you how to sow them, but you must do the rest yourself."

"People are so unobliging nowadays," murmured Njobvu,





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but Rabbit took no notice for he was busy placing three pumpkin seeds in each mound. When he had sown the seeds, he covered them carefully with fine, crumbly earth and then he watered them. Finally he shaded them from the fierce heat of the sun with little leafy branches of Msuku tree, and all the time, Elephant stood by, grumbling loudly.

"There is no need to stand and watch me any more," said Kalulu at last. He was beginning to feel annoyed with Elephant. "You know now what you have to do. Why don't you go and make a start?"

"Oh, very well! If you won't come and help me, I suppose I shall have to do everything myself!" With a very bad grace Njobvu picked up Kalulu's hoe and the pumpkin seeds and ambled off huffily in the direction of his own garden.

A week passed and, in Kalulu's garden, all the little seedlings had thrust their sturdy noses up into the sunlight. Kalulu was so excited when first he saw them that he ran along at once to tell Njobvu and to ask if his seedlings, too, were showing. But Njobvu was not in his garden and one glance was sufficient to show Rabbit that there were no seedlings either. Nor were there likely to be, for the ground had scarcely been prepared at all and the badly scratched-up mounds of earth were innocent of shade and water.

Kalulu sighed. What a waste of good pumpkin seed, he thought, and how like Elephant to make such a fuss and then take no trouble at all. Really, he was too tiresome! And what was that glinting in the far corner underneath a pile of weeds? Rabbit went to investigate and found his own precious hoe. Indignantly he picked it up and started to walk back. As he neared his garden, he heard a loud trumpeting. Evidently Elephant had come to call and it sounded as if he was in a very bad temper! Kalulu hurried forward.

"Hrrumph!" roared Njobvu, the moment he caught sight of Rabbit, "you think you can give me bad seed and keep all the good stuff for yourself, do you? I'll show you that you can't! I'll..."

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"All the seed was the same," said Kalulu coldly.

"The same indeed ! Of course it wasn't—yours has come up and mine has not. Well, if I can't have pumpkins, you shan't either !" And with another loud "Hrrumph !" Elephant brought his monstrous foot down upon the nearest mound of earth and squashed three seedlings flat.

"Stop that !" shouted Kalulu. "Stop that and get out of the garden at once, or I will throw my hoe at you. You shan't spoil my pumpkins !"

Njobvu, who was just about to trumpet again, lowered his trunk and stood quite still looking at the hoe. Then he looked all round the garden and a slow, cunning smile showed for an instant on his face. At length he spoke :

"You must forgive me, Kalulu," he said. "The . . . er . . . disappointment made me lose my temper—only natural, you know, after so much hard work and nothing to show for it !" Here he laughed and, as Kalulu said nothing, he turned the laugh into a cough and looked around again until his eye fell on the three flattened seedlings. He gazed at these with genuine sorrow.

"I fear they are ruined," he murmured with a sigh. "But you should still have a fine crop, Kalulu—a wonderful crop, I hope," he added brightly and, bowing with great dignity to the astonished Rabbit, Njobvu walked away.

Days came and went, and with every one Kalulu's pumpkins grew and grew and grew. He was tremendously proud of them for they promised to be the finest anyone had ever seen. Two of them were larger than Rabbit himself and of these, one was so nearly ripe that he could hardly sleep at nights for wondering if it would be ready to pick in the morning. Every day he would go to the garden and pinch it and prod it, and sometimes he would think that perhaps it *was* ripe and then he would pinch it again and think that perhaps it wasn't.

At last a day came when he knew the pumpkin could be picked



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next morning and, as he lay awake, Kalulu idly considered which of his friends should be invited to share it with him. Tortoise, of course, and Jackal. Ant-bear, perhaps? or Wart-hog? or both? Thank goodness, there was no need to ask Elephant! Njobvu had gone away, or so it was said, though no one quite knew where he was supposed to be. Kalulu hoped he would stay away for a long time—for ever, in fact—and still hoping, he fell asleep.

He woke again in the grey dawn, yawned and stretched himself and wondered for a moment why the day felt somehow important. Then he remembered, jumped up and ran quickly to the garden. In the cold morning light it looked the same as usual. There was the not-quite-ripe big pumpkin and there was . . .

Kalulu stopped dead. His beautiful pumpkin—the one he had come to pick—the one his friends were to share—**WAS NOT THERE.**

Frenziedly he ran to the plant. It wasn't true, it couldn't be true; and all the time Kalulu knew that it *was* true—the pumpkin had gone. But how? Who? No one would have taken it—no one but Elephant, and he had gone away. Kalulu put a dazed paw to his head and tried to think. One thing was certain; the pumpkin had been stolen and therefore someone *had* taken it. Supposing Njobvu had come back? Surely someone would have seen him? Kalulu decided to go and question all his friends. Perhaps one of them might know something.

They did not. They knew nothing, but they were all equally certain that no one but Njobvu could be guilty.

Kalulu returned home, tied a nice, cool strip of banana leaf round his forehead and again sat down to think. After many hours, he hit on a plan. If the thief had been successful once, Kalulu argued, he might try and steal again. He would, in all probability, steal the second pumpkin as soon as it was ripe. Now, supposing that he, Rabbit, was to make a hole near the

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

bottom of the pumpkin and remove all the pulp, then it would be a simple matter to hide inside. There would be plenty of room for him and his spear and his drum and, as soon as the thief came close, he would be able to pounce out and catch him. And, if the wretch proved difficult in any way, Kalulu had only to beat an alarm upon his drum and all his friends would come to his assistance.

It seemed an excellent scheme and, when the pumpkin showed signs of ripening, Kalulu went secretly at nightfall, hollowed it out and crept inside to wait.

By and by, he began to feel sleepy. That would never do ! He sat up with a jerk. Five minutes later he was nodding again—it was stuffy inside the pumpkin and terribly difficult to keep awake. But keep awake he must, or Elephant might come, and he was going to catch Elephant. Yes, that was it, he was going . . . to . . . catch . . .

Kalulu woke again with a feeling of alarm. He seemed to be rising upwards and could not imagine what in the world was happening. Then, from the hole in the pumpkin, for one awful second he saw Njobvu's ivory tusks and, before he could collect his scattered wits, Elephant had swallowed him and the pumpkin whole.

"Ha ! ha ! ha !" chuckled Njobvu. I expect Kalulu was going to eat that to-morrow. Won't he be disappointed when he finds it gone ! Ha ! ha ! And he won't know who has taken it because everyone thinks that I am miles away. Ha ! ha . . .

He broke off suddenly and stood listening. An alarm drum was sounding close by.

"Rat-a-tat-a, rat-a-tat-a, rat-tat, rat-tat,  
Rat-a-tat-a, rat-a-tat-a, rat-tat-tat."

What did it mean ? wondered Njobvu anxiously. Had someone seen him ? If so, it would not do to be found in Rabbit's garden. He began to run, and when he had gone a few yards the drum ceased. All the same, Elephant thought it wise to

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put a good distance between himself and Kalulu's garden and he covered a whole mile before he paused for breath.

As soon as he stopped, the drum started again.

"Rat-a-tat-a, rat-a-tat-a, rat-tat, rat-tat."

Njobvu ran on, wondering how it was that the drum sounded just as close as before. He ran two miles before he dared to stop. The moment he did so, the drum again began to beat and *still* it was close by.

Elephant felt frightened—there was something here that he could not understand—but instinct told him to keep running and he covered five more miles before he felt he must be safe.

He was wrong.

"Rat-a-tat-a, rat-a-tat-a, rat-tat, rat-tat."

Every time he paused, the drum beat loudly.

"Rat-a-tat-a, rat-a-tat-a, rat-tat, rat-tat."

Elephant thought he must be going mad. The thing wasn't possible ! He felt ill, too, for there was a sharp pain in his inside. He supposed that so much running had given him indigestion—either that, or there was something wrong with the pumpkin !

"Rat-a-tat-a, rat-a-tat-a."

It was unbearable ! Again, Njobvu broke into a run, for at least the drum was silent when he was moving. On and on he went, and with every step the pain grew worse. It was as if the pumpkin were alive and kicking, and scratching and jumping up and down all the time ! How Njobvu wished that he had never eaten it. One thing was certain, anyway ; he would never eat another—not even to spite Kalulu !

On, on and on. Njobvu scarcely knew what he was doing. Once, twice he stumbled, but as the drum resumed its maddening beat, he struggled up again. A third time he fell and this time, drum or no drum, he could not rise. With his mouth wide open, he lay upon the ground, panting as if his heart would burst.

Gradually his breathing grew more regular and, as the deep sleep of exhaustion claimed him, the drumming ceased and

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

Kalulu crept out from his hateful prison. For a few moments he regarded the sleeping Elephant. Should he wake him and tell him just what was in his mind ? Perhaps Njobvu was too worn out to understand and it would do no good. Besides, after such a lesson, it was unlikely that Elephant would ever touch another pumpkin and, if he did, Rabbit would know just how to deal with him !

The thought made Kalulu smile. Then he turned away and, at a gentle lope, set out upon his weary journey home.



## THE GREEDY HYENA

“WAKE up ! Wake up ! The sun is down and it is time that you were off !”

Nkhandwe, the Jackal, opened one eye and looked at his wife. Then he shut it again quickly and tried to pretend that he hadn't heard.

“Wake up ! It is time that you were out and hunting for our dinner.” Mkasi walked to where her husband lay and gently pushed him with her nose.

With a yawn, Nkhandwe rose and stretched himself. Then he looked up at the sky and sniffed. “Hm,” he said thoughtfully, “not much wind. I wonder where the best place is to find a dinner ?” It was a nuisance not knowing the country. It had been a nuisance having to move from their old home, but

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the drought had been so bad that there was neither food nor water to be had ; and here, near the lake, there should be both. Jackal wished he knew where to go !

“ Try the track up the mountain,” suggested Mkasi. “ Kamba, the Tortoise, said that the hunting was considered good up there.”

“ Did he ? Then that is where I will go. You had better stay here with the children while I am away and I will come back as soon as possible with something really good to eat. Who knows ? I might perhaps find a Partridge—perhaps even a Chicken ? ”

“ Oh, what a treat that would be ! ” sighed Mkasi. “ It is a long time since we had a good meal and the children are always so hungry.”

“ Just what I was thinking,” said Jackal as he trotted briskly away into the night.

He had not gone far when he heard a soft pad-padding behind him. Instantly he stopped and listened . . . but the padding stopped too, and there was no sound save the rustle of the wind in the long grass and the distant hooting of an Owl. “ Perhaps I was mistaken,” thought Jackal, and he moved on. The steps began again almost at once. Something, someone was following him. There could be no doubt about it at all. Suddenly Nkhandwe wheeled round.

“ Who’s there ? ” he demanded. “ Who are you and why do you follow me ? ”

“ Is that my friend Jackal ? ” said a gruff voice. “ My old friend Jackal ? ”

“ Yes. And, judging by your voice, you are Fisi, the Hyena ? What do you want ? ”

“ I wondered where you were going and why ? ”

“ What’s that to do with you ? ”

“ Nothing,” replied Fisi, “ only I thought you might be going hunting on the mountain and they say the hunting is very bad up there.”

## THE GREEDY HYENA

"Who says so? I was told that it was good."

"Oh, no, it isn't. They all say it is bad—that it is much better down in the plain. Take my advice and try the plain."

Nkhandwe considered for a moment. Could Fisi be speaking the truth? It was very unlike him to do anyone a good turn and certainly he was no friend of Jackal's!

"Are *you* going hunting down below?" Nkhandwe asked suddenly.

"Of course," answered Fisi. "It would be foolish not to go where the hunting is best. You take my advice and go there, too."

"Thank you," said Jackal at last. "I think I will." If Fisi really was going to the plain, then he must be speaking the truth, and possibly, argued Jackal, the Hyena wanted his company. He hoped not, but felt obliged to ask, and when Fisi said that he always preferred to hunt alone, Nkhandwe at once agreed and hurried off down hill as fast as ever he could.

An ugly grin appeared on Fisi's face as the little Jackal disappeared from sight.

"Neatly managed!" he congratulated himself. "Very neat indeed. No one can say old Fisi isn't clever! Now I shall have the run of the mountain and Jackal said that he had heard that the hunting was good. I thought I'd find out something if I followed him! I expect I shall have a wonderful night while Nkhandwe finds nothing at all in the plain. Ha! ha! ha! It makes me laugh to think of it!" And still chuckling delightedly Fisi, the Hyena, stalked off up the mountain.

When several hours had gone by and still Nkhandwe had found nothing that would do for dinner he began to wonder if, after all, he had not been tricked by Fisi. Where was Fisi? Was he hunting in the plain, or had he stayed behind and gone on up the mountain? Had he lied when he said that the hunting was bad up there? If so, Jackal hoped he was having just as much luck as he deserved, for that would be none at all!

Such thoughts, however, were not helping to solve the problem

## THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS

of Jackal's own dinner. What was he to do? Where could he go? He *must* find something. He dare not return empty-mouthed to his hungry wife and children. Nkhandwe was almost in despair when, drifting on the night wind, came the faint scent of a village. He lifted up his head and sniffed. Oh, what a fragrant smell it seemed to him, a glorious smell, rich with the promise of food. What might he not find in a village?

As if in answer to his thought, a cock began to crow, and at the sound, Nkhandwe licked his lips and broke into a trot.

The chicken "khola" was surrounded by a high mud wall but, at one point, there was a hole through which a lean, determined Jackal could just wriggle.

Without a sound, Nkhandwe squeezed through. Quickly he seized the finest Fowl there and, with it in his mouth, crawled back again and trotted silently away.

All next day the Jackal family slept. Only a few feathers remained as evidence of the glorious dinner they had eaten and it was these that attracted Fisi's attention when he came to call at dusk that night.

"What are these?" he screeched, gazing at the feathers in fascinated horror. "Did you find anything yesterday?"

"Yes," replied Jackal. "I found a Chicken."

"A Chicken? Where?"

"There is a village in the plain and, in the 'khola' wall there is a hole."

"Show me the way to it. Show me the way at once! I'm starving, I am! Oh, just let me get amongst those Fowls!"

"Didn't you get any dinner last night?" asked Nkhandwe curiously.

"No, I did not."

"Very well, then, I will show you where the chicken 'khola' is, but mind you don't eat more than one bird. One is enough, and it does not do to be greedy."







## THE GREEDY HYENA

"Yes, yes"—Fisi was impatient—"stop talking and let us start."

The moon was rising by the time they reached the "khola" and the little hole in the wall showed up clearly by its light. Jackal wriggled through without difficulty, but it was not quite so easy for Fisi, even though he was unusually thin. Once inside, however, he lost no time in pouncing on a Chicken, which he gobbled up then and there. Nkhandwe also seized a plump young Fowl and, with a hurried "Come on, Fisi," crawled back with it in his mouth and trotted home to his family.

But Fisi had no intention of "coming on"—not he! He never had intended to eat only one bird—he'd intended to eat as many as he could. "One bird, indeed!" thought he as he devoured a second and pounced on a third. "One bird!"—he'd eat the lot if only they would keep quiet, but by now the whole roost were awake and clucking madly in alarm. He seized a fourth and, as he swallowed it, became aware of voices—angry voices—and steps, running towards the "khola."

"Ai! ai! Some animal is stealing our Chickens!" shouted the villagers. "Wake up! Wake up! Bring sticks and spears and come and help us slay it!"

At that, Fisi realised his danger and made a dash for the hole in the wall. He thrust his head and forepaws through and began to wriggle . . . and wriggle . . . and wriggle . . . It made no difference. He could not get through.

"Why can't I get out?" he wondered desperately. "I got in all right!" Then, gradually, it dawned on him. "Can it be because I've eaten too much? Oh, why wasn't I content with only one bird, like Jackal, then this would never have happened. Now I am stuck and, in a minute, the villagers will be here." He made another frenzied effort and, just as the people came running up, waving their sticks and spears, a portion of the wall around the hole gave way and out sprang Fisi. So great was his panic, that even the four Chickens he had eaten could not prevent him from running faster than he ever had in all his life and,

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before long, the villagers realised that they could not hope to catch him.

“ Ah, well,” they said, as they turned back, “ that Hyena has had such a fright that he won’t trouble us again ! And, if we mend the hole in the ‘khola’ wall, our Chickens will be safe.”



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The long grass whispers

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